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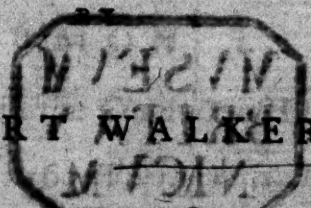
S E R M O N S

EDINBURGH

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S E R M O N S.



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EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM CRESCHE;

AND THOMAS CADELL, LONDON.

M,DCC,XCII.

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S E R M O N S



Entered in Stationers Hall.

Printed by the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

EDINBURGH:

Printed by Wm. Creech,
and Thomas Cressel, London.

1790.

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S E R M O N I.

ON ERRORS IN THE CONDUCT OF LIFE.

PROVERBS, xvii. 16.

*Wherefore is there a price in the hand of
a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no
heart to it?*

FROM the heart proceed the issues of
life. In vain are the greatest out-
ward advantages bestowed on the man who
has suffered his inward frame to go into
disorder. He becomes the slave of irre-
gular passions; he feels an aversion to
the discipline by which wisdom and happi-
ness must be attained; and loses that ba-
lance of mind which alone gives ardour to

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2 *On Errors in the Conduct of Life.*

the laudable pursuits, and a seasoning to the natural pleasures of life.

Nothing, therefore, is so important as the early culture of the heart. In youth we must lay the foundation of future excellence and happiness. We must then begin to control our desires, to cultivate the love of order, and to form a just taste of what is estimable in conduct. We must then learn to apply our faculties steadily, to put a just value on our time, and to disdain the wasting of it in trifling pursuits or pleasures.

This is the *price put into our hand to get wisdom*, but which few, alas ! have the heart to bestow on it.

Whoever, indeed, has lived any considerable time in society, must have observed many instances in which the best natural advantages have been of little or no use to their owners in the great concerns of life. While their talents and dispositions were beginning to unfold, they were beheld with admiration by all around them. The most sanguine

sanguine hopes were entertained of their future success; and no station in society was deemed too high for them to fill with honour and applause.

But, in the progress of life, these early meteors have either gradually faded in splendour, or have taken an eccentric course, and dazzled only without being useful. Confident of their own talents, they have disdained to submit to habits of application; their passions have enslaved them; inconstancy has barred their way to useful attainments; false objects of emulation have led them astray; improper attachments have confirmed the delusions of passion; and they have finally sunk into uselessness, contempt, and misery. Such examples, unhappily too frequent, are beacons set up to warn those who are beginning the voyage of life; or rather, they are the dreary tokens of shipwreck, marking those rocks and shallows that have been fatal to others.

4 *On Errors in the Conduct of Life.*

I PROPOSE, in the following discourse, to state some of the chief causes which contribute to make men fail of attaining those advantages which their talents and opportunities seemed fitted to procure them. This inquiry, I persuade myself, will take in the meaning and spirit of the text ; as I consider the *price* here spoken of to be the natural endowments and means of improvement afforded us by Providence, and the *wisdom* to be purchased by it, to be,

1st, A well ordered mind ; 2dly, The blessings usually connected with it, viz. inward satisfaction, a good reputation, and success in the valuable pursuits of life.

The subject might no doubt lead me also to consider the causes of men's miscarriages in the still higher concerns of the world to come ; but, that I may avoid the difficulties attending so wide a plan, I shall only speak at present of that wisdom which is profitable to direct us in the serious business of the present life.

Let

Let us then consider this subject, so interesting to all men, with that attention which it so well deserves; let us examine the chart of that voyage in which so many make shipwreck; let us mark the rocks and shallows, the quicksands and whirlpools, which it is destruction to approach.

The interest of each of us, in this description, is not indeed precisely the same. Some are just embarked, others are in the midst of the passage, and a few almost within sight of shore; but all of us are deeply concerned, if not for ourselves, for our friends, for our children, for posterity, for human nature.

I. THE great purposes of life are often baffled by the neglect of early and vigorous application. We have all known the levity of youth. We cannot but remember that serious tasks were then often undertaken with disgust, prosecuted without attention, and relinquished with joy. At first, indeed,

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the objects of elementary discipline are not clearly apprehended by the greater part of those who are made to submit to it. The constraint is galling ; the labour oppressive ; while the advantages to be derived from it are distant and obscure. Hence arises an impatience of those necessary restraints and difficulties, which, if it be not timeously repressed, is apt to grow to inattention and carelessness, to habits of idleness, and frivolous dissipation. When the first years of life have been thus wasted, without the improvement that ought to have been made, nothing is so difficult as to resume with success the tasks that were then neglected. Vain or sensual habits have blotted the fair page on which the instructions of knowledge were to be impressed. The objects of a tainted imagination draw aside the attention which truth and moral beauty demand from their votaries ; and the mind no longer feels the pure ardours of intellectual ambition. Incumbered with the uneasy feelings of shame, regret, and impatience, the progress is slow and painful.

Shame

Shame obstructs the success of late application ; for, how mortifying is it to be only beginning to learn when we ought to have been in the capacity of teaching others ? How humbling to sue for instruction in subjects that should have been long ago familiar to us ?—Regret, too, is a heavy impediment to late application. Many a languid hour is spent in fruitless wishes ; many a bitter one in galling comparisons between our own backwardness and the progress that others have made. These unpleasant feelings depress the mind, and obstruct its efforts towards the attainment of that excellence which might otherwise be still within reach.

But, though this should not happen, though the mind should retain its ardour in spite of these discouragements, there is still an impatience of spirit, which often renders late application unsuccessful. By grasping at too many objects together, with the view of redeeming lost time, disorder of ideas often ensues, and all the know-
ledge

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ledge that is acquired becomes confused, superficial, and unfit for the purposes of life.

These are the disadvantages under which even the best minds must labour in resuming the tasks that were omitted in their proper season.

But this is the most favourable view of the case ; and a still worse effect often follows from the neglect we are considering. There are few minds that willingly admit reflections on their own misconduct, or dwell by choice on humbling comparisons of themselves with others. When youth has been mispent, and the opportunities of improvement neglected, self-sufficiency often comes in to occupy all the unfurnished part of the mind. If there be any original sprightliness of parts, the danger is the greater of being led to confide in supposed talents, without the aid of application. Such persons flatter themselves that none but the dull need to be laborious ; they listen to the Siren voice of indolence, and presume that their own unaided vigour
of

of mind will put them in possession of all that others acquire by application and industry. A ruinous delusion! ruinous to all that is valuable in life: For all excellence is the fruit of labour; all usefulness flows from it; all happiness is the reward of it. Bitter experience, indeed, will soon undeceive those fools who have not the heart to bestow the proper price of labour and application on the purchase of wisdom. For a time, their vivacity may delight themselves, or those who presage as partially as themselves; but, ere long, the emptiness of their character must appear, and doom them to contempt and uselessness for the remainder of their days.

II. The great purposes of life are often baffled by unbridled passions. I do not mean to draw any illustration from the fierce and turbulent passions, which not only destroy the happiness of the individual, but break in also on the peace and good order of society. Anger, malice, and revenge, have

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indeed

indeed hurried many to their ruin ; but, if these passions have slain their thousands, it may safely be affirmed that the love of pleasure has slain its ten thousands. The progress of civilization, and the restraint of human laws, are a check on the malevolent passions of men. But the polished manners of society, the riches introduced by commerce and arts, and the quiet we enjoy under established laws, are all incentives to the love of pleasure. The system of education, too, is much relaxed from the maxims of self-denial which it formerly inculcated ; and the ideas of the men of this age are little at all offended by a young man's ' rejoicing in his youth, and walking without controul in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes.'

I will not dwell on the gross and degrading sensuality in which too many are plunged. It would surely be superfluous to prove that habits of this kind baffle all the valuable purposes of life. Your own recollection must suggest many melancholy

ly instances, of men, to whom every avenue of fame and prosperity was open, who, by the indulgence of their sensual appetites, have in a few years closed to themselves every comfortable prospect, and forever ruined their health and fortune, their character and peace of mind.

‘ Who hath woe, who hath sorrow, who
‘ hath contention, who hath wounds with-
‘ out cause? They that tarry long at the
‘ wine, they that go to seek mixed wine.

‘ And why wilt thou, O my son, be ravish-
‘ ed with the beauty of a strange woman?

‘ Why wilt thou go into her house when
‘ she sitteth at the door to allure the simple.

‘ Knowest thou not that the dead are there,
‘ and that her guests are in the depths of
‘ hell?’

But, waving any further illustration of the subject in this view, I proceed to observe, that even the inordinate love of mere amusement, the inability of enjoying our-
selves,

* Prov. xxiii, 29, 30; ix. 18.

· selves, excepting in scenes which exhilarate the mind above its natural tone, is a fatal disease, which utterly alienates the heart from the pursuit of wisdom. Let us consider it in two very obvious views,—as trespassing on the time given us for higher purposes,—and as unfitting us for prosecuting these purposes, even in the time which it does not directly consume.

1st, We were not surely brought into the world, and distinguished by the noble faculties we possess, for no other end than to amuse ourselves. We stand in a most serious relation both to God and to our fellow creatures. Should not the thought of this be always near, if not actually present, to our minds? and is it a thought that will consist with habitual levity? Have you already fulfilled the duties arising from these relations so completely, that you may now unbend your diligence, and resign yourselves to repose and pleasure? Can you say to God, ‘ I have glorified thee on earth, I
‘ have finished the work thou gavest me to
‘ do?’

‘do?’ Can you say to men, I have fulfilled, with respect to you, the royal law of love, ‘I have fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and visited the prisoner; I have watched over my own household, and extended my cares to that portion of society with which I was connected, and now there remains no more that my hand findeth to do?’ Can you say, moreover, that, besides attending to your improvement and happiness here, you are fully prepared for an everlasting state hereafter? If so,—let the days remaining of your pilgrimage be devoted to unceasing festivity. ‘Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth your work. Let your garments be always white, and your head lack no ointment.’ But, if any of these great objects have been neglected, nay, if any of them have been accomplished only in part, How are ye, the sons of pleasure, fulfilling the chief end of your creation? Do you reflect that the time thus devoted

devoted to vanity and trifles is a portion of eternity, and that portion of it which shall determine your everlasting state?—The glory of the summer is departed *; the blast of the wilderness has passed over it, and it is gone, and winter tarnishes the beauty of nature. It is sad to see the leafless trees, the naked fields, the ruins of the year: Yet the beauty of nature shall be restored, the leaves, the bloom, and fruits, shall revive. Again the husbandman shall sow in hope, and again the faithful influence of seasons shall fulfil his expectations: But thy mispent youth, O man! shall never return. Thou hast but one seed-time to sow for the harvest of both worlds;—and of this precious season, mountains of gold and clouds of incense cannot redeem the neglect,

2d, I observe, that the inordinate love of pleasure unfits us for prosecuting the true purposes of life, even in the time that is not

* Preached in the beginning of winter 1789.

not directly consumed by it. It is only a series of calm sensations that the mind can support for any length of time without fatigue. Whatever overstrains it, either with respect to exertion or enjoyment, leaves a sense of lassitude behind. It may even be remarked, as a beautiful arrangement of Providence, that the feelings in the latter case are by far the more irksome. The languor of a satiated mind destroys every capacity of enjoyment, until the waste be supplied ;—an interval hideous as the grave ! And who are they, in fact, that shew such symptoms of weariness and dissatisfaction, in the greater part of their time, as the giddy votaries of amusement ? The least attention is a pain, the easiest duties are a burden to them. They cannot take the trouble of their own affairs ; they are strangers to the management of their household ; they are strangers often to the spouse of their youth, and to the children whom God has given them ! O, how corrupting must be the love of pleasure, when

it can so far vitiate the taste, as to produce the dislike of home, and the duties of home, which are the paradise and the raptures of the good !

3dly, Inconstancy is a frequent cause of miscarriage in the great concerns of life. The occupations of men in civil society are various ; and they who have no independent patrimony (by far the greater part) must necessarily make choice of some one of them to procure subsistence. This must be done too in early life, before the natural genius and propensities may have been thoroughly ascertained. Afterwards, perhaps, the person thus fixed to a profession, discovers or imagines unpleasant circumstances attending it. He fancies that his talents have been misapplied, and that they might have been exerted to better purpose in another sphere. These ideas beget a dislike of his situation, and the duties of it become irksome. Here is at once a bar to excellence, and consequently to success, in any eminent degree ; for nothing is more certain

certain than that no man will make great progress in a pursuit which he dislikes. When the taste and affections are alienated from the task of our profession, it becomes a sorrowful and abject drudgery.

There is great reason, therefore, to repress every suggestion that tends to seduce our minds from the proper objects of our calling. It is generally a false light, misleading us from the plain and direct course, where Providence is our guide, into by-paths full of danger. 'As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place *.'

Few men are endowed with such versatile talents, as to turn with success to a business in which they have not had the advantage of early instruction and practice. The experiment is in general unfortunate, even with respect to the person's own feelings. He finds unforeseen causes of languor and disappointment, where he expected

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* Prov. xxvii. 3.

ed nothing but unabated ardour, and brilliant success; his alacrity subsides, and he sinks into inactivity and despondence.

Besides, mankind are suspicious of those who make so adventurous a change, and seldom give them credit even for the qualifications they may really possess for their new situation. Thus, a great part of life is wasted in anxious efforts to force that estimation, which would have been easily obtained by a steady exertion at first.

But, tho' inconstancy should not carry a man so far as this, it is still, in all its degrees, unfriendly to success or excellence in any pursuit. The human mind is so constituted in general, that nothing but the decided application of our faculties to one principal pursuit can carry it to high and useful eminence. They who aim at many objects at the same time, seldom attain any one of them in perfection. 'Unstable as water, they cannot excel.' They may, indeed, be admired for a multiplicity of specious accomplishments; but, in the real business
of

of life, they will generally be found irresolute and trifling, and useless to themselves and others.

4th, False emulation is often a source of ruinous miscarriage in the conduct of life. The desire of excellence, in some one respect or other, appears with the first dawning of reason. While the powers of the body are forming, Nature has wisely inspired an emulation in all those exercises which contribute to its growth and activity. In the progress of elementary education, competitions of a more profitable kind are excited, which often give alacrity to studies that would languish in solitude. But there is a critical season in life, when the taste is either formed to excellent pursuits, or perverted to such as are low, vicious, or trifling. This generally happens at the time when, freed from the restraints of early discipline, we begin to mingle with mankind at large, and to observe the manners, maxims, and fashions, of the times. By the impressions then made, the future character

rafter will naturally be formed ; and ah ! how many a promising bloom has been thus blasted forever ! That spirit of enterprise, which, under proper direction, would have stimulated the pursuit of excellence, perverted by evil example, and false emulation, becomes the source of rivalships in vice, and leads to every superfluity of naughtiness, to unbounded expence, absurd courage, brutal intemperance, wanton outrage, total and audacious profaneness. These are the distinctions of character to which false emulation aspires, and of which, incredible as it may seem, many who, from their talents and education, might have been ornaments of human nature, make their only boast. It is a small matter that they have sprung from an honourable ancestry, that they inherit a splendid fortune, that they are entitled to converse on a footing with the senators and nobles of the land. Such distinctions they hardly call their own. But, of dangers braved without a motive of common sense, of gross feats of
intern-

intemperance, of wanton and ridiculous achievements, in contempt of all order and decency, nay, of their familiarity with the most profligate and contemptible of mankind, they will speak as the honour and happiness of their lives!—If any should think this description overcharged, I will not keenly dispute the matter with him. In such an argument, I should wish to be baffled. But, as there is at least some truth in the account that has been given of this vicious emulation, I have mentioned it as one instance of a *price being in the hand of a fool to get wisdom*, who having no heart to it, only increases thereby his stock of FOLLY.

5thly, Improper attachments often destroy the usefulness and happiness of life. These confirm the delusions of passion, and add force to the motives of false emulation. That a man is formed by the company he keeps, is a maxim universally acknowledged. ‘He that walks with the wise shall be
wise ;

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‘wise ; but a companion of fools shall be
‘destroyed *.’

From the first strong attachment that is formed, the character takes a tincture which commonly lasts through life. Innumerable are the channels through which confidence and intimacy with any person imperceptibly infuse the same habits of thought and conduct. The indolence, the voluptuousness, the inconstancy, the perverted pursuits of our companions, fasten their contagion on our minds as certainly as their plague or leprosy would in the same case infect our bodies. Of all the connections of friendship, the one most to be dreaded, in this view, is with the witty and facetious profligate. It gradually undermines every principle of virtue ; and, under the mask of agreeable qualities, taints the mind with aversion to all that is serious and good. Seldom, indeed, do precipitate attachments of any kind fail to become snares or intanglements

* Prov. xiii. 20.

tanglements in the subsequent business of life. The young can have acquired but little discernment of character, and are easily imposed on by plausible appearances, and the caresses of seeming affection ; but, under these may be concealed a mean and base disposition, a designing and perfidious heart. Far be the counsel that would instil perpetual suspicion into the minds of the young. Excessive distrust is then an unnatural, unpromising appearance. Still, however, a certain degree of caution, in forming attachments, is absolutely necessary, if we desire not to expose our virtue, happiness, and reputation, to constant danger.

These observations apply to the attachments of love between the sexes, as well as to others. Caution, in this respect, is even more necessary than in the connections of friendship. The irrevocable bond, which death or disgrace only can dissolve, is a momentous step in life. How many have sacrificed themselves to hasty partialities ?

How

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How many, whose prospects were very promising, have all at once, by a foolish choice in this respect, involved themselves in mean estimation, anxiety, and indigence?

Thus have I endeavoured to trace some of the causes which contribute to make men fail of attaining those advantages in life, which their talents and opportunities seemed fitted to procure them.

If any shall think that the observations which have been made on this subject have favoured more of worldly than of religious wisdom, I have this to say in reply, that the snares which have been mentioned are not more fatal to our temporal, than they are to our eternal interests. For, as 'godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;' so the dispositions opposite to godliness are equally ruinous in the same respects. He that is careful to avoid the snares that have been pointed out only for the sake of his temporal interest, has

has his reward *here*, in the good estimation of men, and in the probable success of his worldly pursuits. As our blessed Lord said of the *unjust steward*, he is 'wise in his generation;' and in so far is to be commended; but, if he goes no farther, if he has no *heart to the wisdom* that is unto salvation, there is an awful question which stands against him, 'Thou fool, what is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul *?'

We are Candidates for higher rewards than this world affords; we look for 'glory, honour, and immortality.' Jesus, who redeemed us with his blood, sets before us the hope of 'an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.' The present time is given us to acquire a meetness for this inheritance. The word of God, the ordinances of religion, the dispensations of Providence, are the means appointed for training us to that meetness; and the Holy

D Spirit

* Matthew xvi. 26.

Spirit is promised to accompany, with his effectual aid, our faithful improvement of these means. What, then, is our duty as partakers of this high vocation? I will state it in the very words of Scripture: ‘ Give all
 ‘ diligence to make your calling and elec-
 ‘ tion sure. Be not slothful in business, but
 ‘ fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Dearly
 ‘ beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and
 ‘ pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which
 ‘ war against the soul. For this we know,
 ‘ that no whoremonger, nor unclean per-
 ‘ son, nor covetous man, who is an idola-
 ‘ ter, hath any inheritance in the king-
 ‘ dom of Christ and of God. Let no man
 ‘ deceive you then with vain words, for,
 ‘ because of these things cometh the wrath
 ‘ of God upon the children of disobedience.
 ‘ Be not ye therefore partakers with them,
 ‘ and have no fellowship with the unfruit-
 ‘ ful works of darkness, for evil communi-
 ‘ cations corrupt good manners.—Finally,
 ‘ brethren, whatsoever things are true, what-
 ‘ soever things are honest, whatsoever things
 ‘ are

‘are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things, and do them, and the God of peace shall be with you.’ Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N II.

ON THE CHARACTER OF SAUL KING OF
ISRAEL.

I SAMUEL xxxi. 4.

*Then said Saul unto his armour-bearer,
Draw thy sword, and thrust me through
therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and
thrust me through and abuse me. But his
armour-bearer would not ; for he was fore-
afraid ; therefore Saul took a sword and fell
upon it.*

SUCH was the miserable end of the first
King of Israel, a man whose outset in
life promised a better fate. The steps by
which he lost the favour of God, the peace
of

of his own mind, and the happiness of his life and reign, open a large field of moral and religious instruction. I propose to consider them in the following discourse, and to raise on them some lessons for the conduct of life.

We have no other account of Saul, or of his kindred, before he was appointed to the throne of Israel, but that his father was of the tribe of Benjamin, 'a mighty man of power,' according to the simple ideas of those times, and that he himself was, with regard to external appearance, a 'choice young man, and a goodly.' In his first interview with the Prophet Samuel, we meet with little that can throw light upon his character. His behaviour on that occasion was natural and modest, such as might have been expected from a young man in his circumstances, surprised with the unexpected intelligence which the Prophet brought him. 'Am not I a Benjamite,' said he, 'of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families

' milies of the tribe of Benjamin ; where-
' fore then speakest thou so to me * ?'

The same appearance of natural diffidence occurs upon his actual appointment to fill the throne ; on which occasion, we are told that, when the people sought him he could not be found, having ' hid himself among the stuff †.' His retreat, however, was soon discovered ; and, when he was brought forth, all the people shouted and said, ' God save the King !'

But the subjection to kingly power was new to the Israelites ; and the elevation of any individual to this unexampled eminence, could not fail to produce murmuring and envy. Here began the trial of Saul's capacity and dispositions ; and the conduct he adopted displays an uncommon degree of moderation and prudence. For, when ' the children of Belial,' the dissolute and factious part of the community, said, ' How shall this man save us ?' and, when they

* 1 Samuel, ix. 21.

† Ibid: v. 22.

they despised him, and brought him no presents, Saul, we are told, 'held his peace,' waiting, as it would appear, for a favourable opportunity of shewing that he was not destitute of talents for government *. Such an opportunity soon occurred.

The Ammonites having imposed disgraceful conditions on the men of Jabelh Gilead, these last besought protection from the Israelites; and tidings of the matter came to the ears of Saul. Moved with a generous indignation at the cruel terms on which the Ammonites insisted, he set himself for the defence of the suppliants, in a manner that shewed a heroic and enterprising spirit. 'He took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them through all the coasts of Israel, by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen †.' The success of this measure was complete; for the

* 1 Samuel, x. 27.

† Ibid. xi. 7.

the men of Israel, with one consent, came out, and discomfited the Ammonites with great slaughter. Thus Saul established himself on the throne, and put to shame those who affected to hold him in contempt. Neither did he sully the glory of his success, by stretching forth his hand with severity against the enemies of his government. When the people were clamorous in demanding that those who had spoken contemptuously of him should be put to death, Saul answered, with a noble and generous firmness, ‘ There shall not a man be put to death this day, for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel *.’

Thus far the conduct of Saul was not only irreproachable, but worthy of great applause. From so good a beginning, the men of Israel would be led to expect the blessings of a happy and glorious reign.—But, who can trace the mazes, or foretell the vicissitudes, of the human character ? The heart
‘ is

* 1 Samuel, xi. 13.

‘ is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it * ?’

The *first* occasion on which Saul betrayed an improper disposition was when he was encamped against the Philistines at Gilgal. He had gone thither at Samuel’s command, and had been enjoined to tarry seven days, till the Prophet should come, and offer burnt offerings, and shew him what he was to do. Saul tarried indeed the seven days that were set ; but then the impatience of his spirit broke forth. Imagining that his situation was becoming hazardous, and that Samuel had broken his promise, he offered the burnt offering himself, and made ready to give battle to the enemy †. But, was it right in Saul to do this ? was it right in him to distrust the man of God, who had anointed and instructed him, and shewn him things past and to come ? Was it right in him thus to give way to the impatience of his spirit ?

E

or

* Jeremiah xvii. 9.

† 1 Samuel xiii. 8. 9.

or ought he not rather, considering his recent elevation to the throne, and his absolute dependence on the directions of the Prophet, to have ‘behaved and quiet-
 ‘ed himself, as a child that is weaned
 ‘of his mother *?’ What said Samuel when he came and found him just ending the presumptuous oblation? ‘Thou
 ‘hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the
 ‘commandment of the Lord thy God
 ‘which he commanded thee, for now
 ‘would the Lord have established thy
 ‘kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now
 ‘thy kingdom shall not continue; the
 ‘Lord hath fought him a man after his
 ‘own heart, and the Lord hath command-
 ‘ed him to be Captain over his people, be-
 ‘cause thou hast not kept that which the
 ‘Lord commanded thee †.’

But, does not this appear a severe sentence, on an offence seemingly so trivial? Was not Saul justified, in some measure at least,

* Psalms cxxxi. 2.

† 1 Samuel xiii. 8.—14.

least, by waiting for Samuel the seven days that he had set? It is not perhaps competent for us to pronounce on a question where we have so little light to guide our decision. It may, however, be observed, that Samuel had been as it were in 'God's 'stead' to Saul, from the first notice that he got of his appointment to the throne. His distrust of the Prophet, therefore, betrayed a distrust of God himself, and a preference of the resources of his own wisdom to the guidance and protection of heaven. But this is a disposition against which God has declared his utter displeasure. 'Thus 'saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that 'trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, 'and whose heart departeth from the Lord. 'For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh. 'But it is good for a man that he both 'hope and quietly wait for the salvation of 'God. He shall be as a tree planted by 'the waters, and that spreadeth out her 'roots by the river, and shall not see when 'heat

‘heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green,
 ‘and shall not be careful in the year of
 ‘drought, neither shall cease from yielding
 ‘fruit *.’

But the sentence of the Prophet may be vindicated upon other grounds. In truth, when properly considered, it is not so severe as at first sight it may seem. It debars, indeed, the offspring of Saul from an inheritance to which they could assert no right; but, as to himself, it had no calamitous effect; it neither hurt the happiness of his life nor reign till he brought distress on himself by subsequent crimes of a deeper dye. This indeed was soon the case; which leads me to observe that the

Second instance in which Saul betrayed the faultiness of his character, was in the case of the Amalekites, and their King Agag. It does not come within the plan of this discourse to explain the peculiar system of Providence with respect to the Jews.

It

* Jeremiah xvii. 5.—8.

† Lament. iii. 6.

It is sufficient here to observe, that God having separated them from the nations of the earth to be the depositories of religious truth, laid many injunctions on them, which can only be explained by the peculiarity of their situation in this respect. Such, in particular, were the severities which they were commanded to exercise against the idolatrous nations with which they were surrounded. Of these, one of the most formidable were the Amalekites. Accordingly, soon after Saul's establishment on the throne, the word of God came unto him, by the Prophet Samuel, to go and extirpate that nation, and utterly destroy all their possessions. But Saul obeyed this command only in part. He put the *people* of Amalek indeed to the sword, but he spared their *King*. He destroyed that part of the booty which was vile and *refuse*; but the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the lambs, and all that was good, he spared, and would not destroy*.

His

* 1 Samuel xv. 8. 9.

His conduct, in this instance, does not admit the same excuse of infirmity which might be pleaded to alleviate the fault mentioned under the former head. The commandment he had received was express; and his obedience ought to have been unreserved. There was no judgment of discretion left with him, what he should destroy, and what he should spare; yet he ventured to use this officious discretion, and to make his own presumptuous amendment on the mandate of the Most High. Hence the Prophet tells him, that his trespass in this instance was of the most foul and aggravated kind. ‘Behold,’ said he, ‘to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry *.’ It deserves notice too, that, besides the guilt of disobedience to an express command of God, there appear likewise, in this part of Saul’s conduct,

* 1 Samuel xv. 22. 23.

conduct, marks of a disingenuous and mean spirit.—It was disingenuous in him to approach Samuel with that pretended self-congratulation, ‘Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed the commandment of the Lord *.’ Could he be ignorant that, in sparing Agag, and the best of the spoil, he had transgressed the most obvious and emphatical part of the commandment he had received? or, did he think to blind the eyes of the Prophet by this confident language?—It was mean in him, when convicted of criminal disobedience, to put the fault from himself upon the people †. Was he not their leader and their King? and ought he not to have maintained the authority committed to him in all points, especially in such a point as this, where it was impossible for him to mistake the road of his duty? In the

Third place, the faultiness of Saul’s character appears in the slight degree of compunction

* 1 Samuel xv. 13.

† Ibid. xv. 21.

punction he shewed when reproved by Samuel on the occasion we have just noticed. It has been already seen that he first attempted to vindicate his conduct, as though there had been nothing faulty in it, and then to throw the blame of what he had done on the people. At last, however, this confession is extorted from him : ‘ I have
‘ sinned, for I have transgressed the com-
‘ mandment of the Lord, and thy words,
‘ because I feared the people, and obeyed
‘ their voice *.’ But, does it appear to come from a heart truly humbled before God ? ‘ When he was instructed, did he
‘ smite on his thigh ? Was he ashamed and
‘ confounded on account of his sin † ?’ No ; his only solicitude seems to have been, that Samuel might absolve him in presence of the people. He dreaded the inconvenience of being at variance with the Prophet, more than the displeasure of God, or the reproaches of his own heart.

Nay,

* 1 Samuel xv. 24.

† Jerem. xxxi. 19.

Nay, it would appear that he was little concerned even about a thorough reconciliation with Samuel, provided he could only prevail on him to shew him seeming countenance before his subjects. 'I have sinned,' said he, 'yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God *.' This is not the language of contrition, but of proud and stubborn selfishness. It is not the 'godly sorrow that worketh repentance unto salvation never to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world that worketh death †.'

This comment might be deemed rash and severe, were it not justified by the train of his subsequent history. It would even appear that Samuel viewed the circumstances at the time in the very light in which they have been now represented. For, though he complied with Saul's request

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of

* 1 Samuel, xv. 30.

† 2 Corinth. vii. 10.

of honouring him before his people, yet afterwards he 'came no more to see Saul 'until the day of his death.' Nevertheless, it is added, 'Samuel mourned for Saul *.' How beautiful is the simplicity of Scripture? How venerable has Samuel appeared in his public situation? How amiable does he now appear in his retreat? What book but the Bible shews us such characters? While he had any prospect of being useful, he remained about the person of Saul to advise and reprove him. But, when he found him stubborn, and when he found that the people looked for his countenance in measures to which he could no longer give it, Samuel retired to pray and to mourn.

But what became of Saul, thus forsaken by his monitor and guide? Alas! his history becomes melancholy indeed. 'The Spirit of the Lord departed from him, 'and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled 'him.'

* 1 Samuel, xv. 35.

‘him*.’ A disease beyond the reach of medicine consumed him inwardly. A cup of astonishment, mingled by the hand of the Lord, was poured on his imagination, the poison whereof drank up his spirit; the terrors of God were set in array against him; and spectres of horror haunted him on his throne, in his palace, and in his bed. But who can describe the tortures of a mind thus forsaken of God in his wrath? Hear the deep tones of anguish wherein good men have lamented even those temporary desertions with which their failings were chastened. ‘I remembered God, and was troubled. When I suffer thy terrors I am distracted; for day and night thine hand is heavy on me, so that my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten
‘to

* 1 Samuel, xvi. 14.

‘to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up
 ‘his tender mercies*? Such have been
 the bitter complaints of those who suffered
 only the slight corrections of their offended
 father.—What then must have been the
 misery of Saul, who was utterly forsaken
 and cast off for ever? In the

Fourth place, the predominant vice, and
 growing depravity of Saul’s character ap-
 pears in the envy which he betrayed of
 David’s fame, after he had killed Goliath
 the champion of the Philistines. In the re-
 joicings on that occasion, the daughters of
 Israel, while they played on instruments of
 music, shouted also one to another, saying,
 ‘Saul hath slain his thousands, and David
 ‘his ten thousands; and Saul was very
 ‘wroth, and the saying displeased him; and
 ‘he said, they have ascribed unto David ten
 ‘thousands, and to me they have ascribed
 ‘but thousands, and what can he have
 ‘more but the kingdom? and Saul eyed
 ‘David

* Psalms lxxvi. 3. 5.—8.

* David from that day and forwards *. How quick is the progress of depravity and wretchedness, when a man is forsaken of God, and made to drink of those sorrows which he distributes in his anger? Saul, already possessed by an evil spirit from God, is now seized by the most miserable and pernicious of human passions; for 'Jealousy is the rage of a man; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame †.' See how soon it leads him to meditate the basest violence against its innocent object. It was but the morrow after it had found entrance into his breast, when it had grown even to fury. 'I will smite David to the wall with this javelin ‡.' But in vain did he throw the deadly weapon; for the Lord was with David, to guard him against the terror by night, and the arrow that flieth by day. Failing, in this open attempt, on the life of his

* 1 Samuel xviii. 7.—9. † Prov. vi. 34.; Cantic. viii. 6.

‡ 1 Samuel xviii. 10.

his servant, he has recourse to schemes of hidden treachery. He offers to make the man whom he hated his son-in-law, upon a condition which he expected would be fatal to his life *. Disappointed in this also, he again seeks to smite him with the javelin; nay, he seeks to smite his own son Jonathan because he spake in favour of David †. At length, his rage overflowed like a torrent, so that, in the fury of his disappointed malice, he destroyed fourscore and five priests, with a whole city that belonged to them, men, women, and children, merely on a *suspicion* that they favoured David ‡. It would be tedious and painful to recount all the means which he employed for accomplishing his destruction; it is enough to observe that he devoted the study and labour of his life to this one object, watching for him by night and day in the wilderness and in the city, and hunting

* 1 Samuel xviii. 25.

† Ibid. xi. 33.

‡ Ibid. xxii. 18. 19.

hunting him, like a partridge, on the tops of the mountains. In the

Fifth place, the depravity of Saul's character appears in his resuming his cruel purposes, after his own conscience had testified to him the baseness of his conduct. It was first in the cave of *Engedi*, and afterwards on the hill of *Hachilah*, that Saul acknowledged the generous forbearance of David, in not taking his life when it was in his power, and vowed solemnly to desist from persecuting him more. He lift up his voice and wept, and said unto David, 'Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. Return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day. Behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly *.' But these promising tokens of repentance, like the morning cloud, and the early dew, soon passed away.

* 1 Samuel xxiv. 16. 17. and xxvi. 21.

away. He turned back, and dealt treacherously, as in former times. 'When the 'unclean spirit' said our Lord 'is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first *.' Of this mysterious parable the case of Saul is in part an illustration. The evil spirit, which had been banished for a time, by transient feelings of penitence, returned, and found him still destitute of any permanent principle of goodness. He entered his former abode in greater force than ever, and led him finally into all the depths of Satan. For, in the

Sixth

* Matthew xii. 43. &c.

Sixth and last place, the total and confirmed depravity of Saul's character appears from the profane resource he employed to inform himself of the issues of futurity. He well knew that the arts of *divination* and *necromancy* were forbidden in the law of God. 'There shall not be found among
 ' you one that useth divination, or an ob-
 ' server of times, or an enchanter, or a
 ' witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with
 ' familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necro-
 ' mancer. For all that do these things are
 ' an abomination unto me, saith the Lord *.
 Saul, I say, knew well this statute of the law, and had himself enforced it with vigour in the beginning of his reign. Nevertheless, when the Philistines came up against him, he betook himself to these machinations of darkness. 'Seek me out a woman that
 ' hath a familiar spirit,' said he to his servants, 'that I may go and inquire of her †.'

And now his miserable history draws to a

G

close.

* Deuteron. xvi. 10.—12. † 1 Samuel xxviii. 7.

close. The unhallowed experiment was allowed to succeed so far as to shew him the fate that awaited him on the morrow. In the dark retreat of the proscribed force-refs, he saw the deceased Prophet, or a *vision* of the Prophet, and heard his own doom pronounced in these words: ‘The Lord will deliver Israel, with thee, into the hands of the Philistines, and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me *.’

The morrow came, and Saul prepared himself for the hopeless field. He girt on that armour which he was never to put off. The battle went fore against him. His sons were slain around him, and he himself was fore wounded by the archers. In these wretched circumstances, the evil spirit prevailed finally against him, by leading him to commit the last and irretrievable act of human rashness. ‘Then said Saul unto his armour bearer, draw thy sword, and thrust

‘ thrust me through therewith, lest these
‘ uncircumcised come and thrust me through
‘ and abuse me; but his armour bearer
‘ would not, for he was fore afraid. There-
‘ fore Saul took a sword and fell upon it.’

SERMON

S E R M O N II.

P A R T II.

ON THE CHARACTER OF SAUL KING OF
ISRAEL.

I SAMUEL xxxi. 4.

Then said Saul unto his armour-bearer, draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me. But his armour-bearer would not ; for he was sore afraid ; therefore Saul took a sword and fell upon it.

IT was proposed to consider the steps by which Saul lost the favour of God, the peace of his own mind, and the happiness of his life and reign, with the view of raising some lessons on them for the conduct
of

of Life. Having finished the historical part in the former discourse, I proceed to observe that the review we have taken of Saul's character and history lead us, in the

First place, to reflect on RASHNESS as a source of his crimes and misfortunes. From an ordinary rank among his countrymen, and from the simple habits of rural life, he was suddenly raised to the dignity, and summoned to the arduous duties of sovereign power. The change was great; and, for a time, he appears to have felt that distrust of himself which was natural and becoming in his circumstances. But, when the diffidence which unavoidably sprung from his new situation was dispelled, he soon betrayed marks of a mind impatient of calm deliberation, and still more impatient of reproof or controul. His presumptuous offering at Gilgal, his hasty attack on the Philistines at Gibeah, without waiting for the answer of the priests, and his unadvised adjuration, during the heat of the battle of that day, that none of the people should taste

taste food until the evening, betray the rashness of his mind *.

His prevarication with Samuel when he reproved him for his transgression ; and his general sullenness of behaviour, which at last forced the Prophet to leave him, shew his impatience of admonition or controul, even from the man who had anointed him to the throne, and spoken to him the words of God. He forsook the guide of his youth, and cast all his reproofs behind his back. We have seen the fatal consequence. God left him to himself, and he wandered in the counsels of his own heart, until his feet stumbled on the dark mountains. His fate verifies the warning voice of wisdom.

‘ Because I have called and ye refused, I
‘ have stretched forth my hand and none
‘ regarded ; but ye have set at nought all
‘ my counsel, and would none of my re-
‘ proof ; I also will laugh at your calamity,
‘ I will mock when your fear cometh,
‘ when

* 1 Samuel xiii. 9. ; xiv. 19. 24.

‘when your fear cometh as desolation,
‘and your destruction as a whirlwind,
‘when distress and anguish cometh upon
‘you. For the turning away of the sim-
‘ple shall slay them, and the prosperity of
‘fools shall destroy them *.’

Let the example of Saul be a warning to the young to beware of self-sufficient thoughts, of rashness in conduct, and of despising the reproofs of those who have a natural title to advise and admonish them. Beware of letting the thought enter your minds, that it is *manly* to begin life on this adventurous plan. Do you suppose that all mankind before you have erred in thinking modesty to be becoming in youth, and experience to be necessary to wisdom? Or, do you reckon your own talents to be so great as to form an exception to these maxims?—Examine by what good reasons you can support either of these opinions, and do not think that
your

your self-confidence can of itself alter the nature of things. The credit and success of life often depend on some of the earliest steps we take in it. Why then should you expose yourselves, by precipitancy, to stumble so fatally in the outset, that you may never be able to recover your steps? Many have done so in former times. Many who have set out with the fairest prospects, have, by single acts of rashness in the critical conjunctures of life, thrown away their happiness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Thus did Saul, whose history we have been considering; and the event will generally be the same in every rank and profession of life. In some rare instances, the impetuous and self-confident may arrive at dazzling success; but it will ever be found that prudent and cautious self-control is the surest road to all the valuable advantages of life.

Connected with RASHNESS, we are led to reflect, in the

Second

Second place, on STRUBBERNESS, as a source of Saul's sinfulness and misfortunes. The pride of a man's heart is often summoned up to defend the rashness of his conduct even to himself. He feels that he has committed a folly; but he will, rather brave all its consequences than admit a sentiment of self-disapprobation. Nothing can be so pernicious, both to our character and to our happiness. God is represented by the Prophet Jeremiah as putting this question, "Why is the people of Jerusalem flidden back with a perpetual backsliding; they hold fast deceit; they refuse to return." The answer is given, and the consequence foretold, in the subsequent verse. "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his evil way, saying, What have I done?" Every one turned to his dishonesty as the horse rusheth into the bayonet. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not ashamed; neither could they blush.—Therefore shall they fall among them.

‘them that fall, in the time of their visitation, shall they be cast down, and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them, saith the Lord *.’

The case of Saul coincides so much with this description, that one would imagine it had been actually in the eye of the Prophet. Scarcely was he seated on the throne when he began to slide back with a ‘perpetual backsliding.’ In vain did Samuel represent to him the folly and guilt of his conduct; he still held fast the deceitful counsels of his own heart, and ‘refused to return.’ At last, the spirit of God ceased to strive with him, and he was left to fill up the measure of his iniquities. Then, indeed, the day of visitation overtook him. On the mountains of Gilboa he was cast down, never to rise; ‘his root became as rottenness, and his blossom as the chaff which the wind driveth away;’ the crown which God had given him passed from him, and from his offspring, because

* Jeremiah viii. 5.—12.

‘because he had cast away the law of the
‘Lord of hosts, and despised the word of
‘the Holy one of Israel.’

Let the fate of Saul be a warning against
STUBBORNNESS. Rashness exposes us to
many dangers; but rashness, joined with ob-
stinacy, is the high road to ruin. It is thus
that men are led to sacrifice the peace and
happiness of life, nay sometimes life itself,
to defend a point of false honour, which
their own hearts condemn. Let us beware
of every sentiment which, under the colour
of dignity or honour, conceals stubbornness
of spirit. Let us beware of persisting in
any course of action which our reason and
conscience disapprove. We may defend
our conduct to men; we may even learn
to hide the guilt of it from our own eyes;
but we cannot escape the judgment of God,
who seeth not as man seeth, ‘who is greater
‘than our hearts, and knoweth all things.’
‘It shall not be well with the wicked;
‘neither shall he prolong his days, which
‘are

'are as a shadow, because he feareth not
 'before God. Though wickedness be sweet
 'in his mouth, though he hide it under his
 'tongue, though he spare it and forsake it
 'not; yet surely he shall not feel quietness.
 'Terrors are upon him: All darkness shall
 'be hid in his secret places. God shall
 'cast the fury of his wrath upon him; the
 'bow of steel shall strike him through, yea
 'the glittering sword shall enter into his gall.
 'Behold, this is the portion of a wicked
 'man from God, and the heritage appoint-
 'ed to him by God *.' In the

Third place, the review we have taken of
 Saul's history leads us to reflect on ENVOUS
 JEALOUSY as a source of his crimes and
 misfortunes. This was indeed the predom-
 inant vice of his character. He found
 David acquiring a fame which he dreaded
 would eclipse his own; and the songs of
 the daughters of Israel, when they ascribed
 to him only his thousands slain, but to Da-
 vid

* Job xx. 20, &c.

vid his ten thousands, filled him with black and vengeful designs. Instead of cherishing the rising valour of the stripling, instead of joining in the praise it had acquired, which, by a generous and dignified conduct on his part, would soon have become his own, he felt the tortures of *rivalry*, and set himself to practise against his life. This shameful passion soon overcame every just, and generous, and decent regard. He became ungrateful, perfidious, savage, a terror to his family, a scourge to his subjects, a torment to himself.

Let his example be a warning to suppress the first risings of this detestable passion. For this purpose, let us examine ourselves carefully, for there are many circumstances which tend to excite it, and it often lurks unperceived within us. The world at large is a scene of competition, where many are struggling for what few can attain. We all desire to prosper and to excel. But the extent of human prosperity and excellence is so limited, that their value is chiefly estimated

mated by comparison. A trifling, nay an imaginary want, may poison the source of happiness, even in the most prosperous state. Haman, the favourite of the King of Persia, was miserable for want of the homage of an obscure individual. The enjoyment of the highest reputation too may be destroyed by that exclusive passion for fame, which sickens at the applause bestowed on another. From the day that Saul heard the acclamations in praise of David's bravery, from that day he 'eyed him and forward.'

Have we ever felt a symptom resembling this? Have we ever felt a twitch at the heart when our neighbour was praised for qualifications in which we aspire to excel? It is ENVY; it is the most perfidious of human passions; a passion that will sacrifice truth, and justice, and friendship, and gratitude, without scruple or remorse; and sacrifice them, not to increase our own happiness, but to compass the misery of others. Pluck this viper out of your bosom, else it will
gnaw

gnaw you to the heart. Why should our eye be evil because our neighbour prospers and excels? Is there not room in the world for both of us? Let him rise; he has not trodden upon us. Let him excel; he has blasted no talent of ours. Do we grudge his prosperity? Do we sicken at his praise? Do we repine at the addition to general happiness and excellence which takes nothing from ourselves? It is a base feeling, and the parent of a hopeless passion. Every man's self-interest is in league against it. The Providence of God, which delights in diffusing happiness, is against it. HEAVEN shuts its door against the envious. HELL alone remains for their reception, where 'their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.' In the

Fourth place, the review we have taken of Saul's history leads us to reflect on UN-FAITHFULNESS to his CONSCIENCE, as a source of his crimes and misfortunes. In the midst of his backslidings, conscience at times lifted up its voice, and testified to him the base-

baseness of his conduct. He was more than once led to see and acknowledge his iniquity in persecuting David, nay, and to vow, with tears in his eyes, that he would desist from doing him any harm; but he turned not at the reproof of his conscience; he forgot his vows, and dealt treacherously as before.

The case is frequent with sinners of all descriptions. The Providence of God brings them into situations wherein they cannot but see the errors of their lives. Their way is hedged up with thorns; the Angel of the Lord stands in a narrow place, with a sword in his hand,* and scares them from pursuing the path that leads to ruin †. In the language of the Prophet Jeremiah, 'Their own wickedness corrects them, and their backslidings admonish them, how evil and bitter a thing it is that they have forsaken the Lord their God *.' But they do not follow out their convictions; they

* Jerem. ii. 19.

† 1 Numbers xxii. 36.

they imprison the truth in unrighteousness, and refuse to let go their iniquities. This is what the Scriptures emphatically call 'grieving the Holy Spirit of God.' Nothing is so dangerous as to resist the motions of grace, thus seconded by the admonition of our own feelings. Conscience, often despised, ceases to be a reprove, and the fatal sentence goes forth: 'He is joined to his idols, let him alone *.' An interdict is thus put on all the usual means by which reformation is brought about, and the unhappy person is sealed in final impenitence to the day of judgment. This is the doctrine of Scripture, and it is confirmed by experience. It is delivered in very awful terms, in the word of God. 'He that, being often reprove, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the great-

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* Hosea iv. 17.

'ness of his folly he shall go astray.—For
'it is impossible for those who were once
'enlightened, and have tasted the good
'word of God, and the powers of the
'world to come, if they shall fall away to
'renew them again unto repentance *.' Ex-
perience confirms these doctrines of Scrip-
ture. It is actually seen that men, by sti-
fling their compunctions, may at last attain
a total insensibility, or, at least, so far weak-
en their moral powers, that, though they
see their guilt and danger, they cannot re-
sist the impulse which hurries them on to
ruin. The prevailing passion indeed, is not
the same in all men. It may be Envy, as in
the case of Saul ; or Voluptuousness, as in the
case of Solomon ; or Covetousness, as in the
case of Ahab. But there is little difference as
to the influence of the predominant passion,
whatever it may be, on the general charac-
ter and habits of the person. If it is not
resisted in the beginning, it will certainly
grow in strength. If, while it is still *young*,
we

* Prov. xxix. 1.—v. 22, 23. ; Heb. vi. 6.

we do not controul it by the discipline of reason, when it is become *old*, it will become the tyrant of our soul, and carry us to extremities we now shudder to think of. In the

Last place, the review we have taken of Saul's history leads us to ascribe the crimes and misfortunes of his life, in a great degree, to IRRELIGION. It was this that left him under the slavery of his passions, and left him without consolation in the day of adversity. Even in the best part of Saul's history we see few or no marks of a mind impressed with the genuine principles of religion,—the fear and love of God, reverence for his authority, and reliance on his promises. It is true, that, while he submitted to the counsels of Samuel, he performed certain acts outwardly religious. But, even in these, we may discover a spirit different from that of true piety. He sacrificed, indeed, burnt offerings to the Lord; but they were presumptuous offerings, which God did not desire at his hands.

He

He sent for the ark of the Lord, to take counsel in the day of battle; but the impatience of his spirit would not let him wait for the answer. In the latter part of his life, too, it would appear that the anxiety of his mind sometimes led him to inquire of the Lord by the methods appointed under the old dispensation *. But his conduct in this respect resembled that of his countrymen in the wilderness, of which God himself thus testifies by the mouth of the Prophet Asaph.

‘ When their days were consumed in vanity and their years in trouble, when he
 ‘ slew them, then they sought him, and
 ‘ they returned, and inquired early after
 ‘ God; and they remembered that God
 ‘ was their rock, and the High God their
 ‘ Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter
 ‘ him with their mouth, and they lied unto
 ‘ him with their tongues; for their heart
 ‘ was not right with him; neither were
 ‘ they stedfast in his covenant †.’

The same case is frequent in all ages.
 Times

* 1 Samuel xxviii. 6.

† Psalms lxxviii. 33. &c.

Times of calamity often impel, even ungodly men, to resort to religion, as a temporary shelter. But the thorough conversion of the soul to God is very different from these transient feelings. It is not the selfish desire of a hiding place in the evil day ; it is the ingenuous and cordial return of the wandering affections to God, as their true and only portion ; it is the mixture of joy and shame in the repenting prodigal, when his father falls on his neck, and embraces him : It is the tear of gratitude that bursts from the condemned rebel, when a pardon from his sovereign is put into his hand.

Saul never had any of these genuine tokens of penitence. His fears, indeed, were alarmed ; for he could not but see the miseries with which he was threatened. But his heart, still trusting in refuges of lies, was not right with God ; and he remained the slave of sinful passions.

It was observed, that the want of religion, not only left Saul under the slavery of sin, but

but deprived him of all consolation in the day of calamity. For a proof of this, I need only refer you to his own account of his situation. ‘I am sore distressed, for the
 ‘Philistines make war against me; and
 ‘God is departed from me, and answereth
 ‘me no more, neither by prophets nor by
 ‘dreams.’—It is not easy to see what resources a man destitute of religion can have, even under the ordinary disappointments and calamities of life; but it is impossible to see what consolation is left to him, when the misery he suffers is the manifest consequence of criminal habits, which he has neither the inclination nor power to forsake. ‘A dreadful sound is in his ears; he is
 ‘scared with dreams, and terrified through
 ‘visions; and he believeth not that he shall
 ‘return out of darkness.’—Is it surprising, that a being so forlorn, and so destitute of all salutary restraint, should sink into total despair, and resort to that dreadful relief, the voluntary extinction of life.

Let

Let us take warning from the miserable end of Saul against the danger of IRRELIGION. Many faults we have seen in his life ; rashness, obstinacy, envy, and repeated backslidings. But if, from the depth of his guilt and misery, Saul could have looked up to heaven, and on his bended knees implored mercy from his Creator, all might have been well. It was Irreligion that finally ruined Saul ; it was Irreligion that left him, without haven or anchor, amidst the billows of adversity.

Let us beware, then, of shutting up to ourselves the light of heaven ; that gracious light, which best guides the steps of youth, and can alone comfort us when the evil days come. Let us not envy the seeming freedom and prosperity of those who have cast off the fear of God. Look a little forward, and behold their end. Darkness broods over it. Trouble and anguish make them afraid. They go down to regions of horror, and shall never see light.

But, let us not close the subject without

a reviving contrast, after the gloomy reflections that have occurred. Let us cast our eyes for a moment on the comfort which RELIGION affords under the troubles of life, and in the prospect of death. Of this there cannot be a more striking instance than in the collateral history of David, the man whom Saul persecuted, but whom God had chosen to be the Captain over his people Israel. When his sorrows poured in like a flood, and one billow called to another; when Saul had driven him from his country; and when the princes of the Philistines, among whom he had taken refuge, began to shew their jealousy and hatred of him;—nay, when, to complete his woe, the companions of his exile, the few friends in whom he trusted, began to accuse him as the author of their calamities, and to threaten his life;—amidst all this complicated distress, David possessed his soul in patience, and ‘encouraged himself in the Lord his God *.’ And, when the varied scenes of his

* 1 Samuel, xxx. 6.

his pilgrimage were drawing to a close, these were among his last words, in which he expressed the quiet expectation of his soul. 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire *.' 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.'

* 2 Samuel xxiii. 5.

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SERMON

S E R M O N III.

ON DISRELISH OF LIFE.

JONAH iv. 8.

And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said,—‘ it is better for me to die than to live.’

JONAH had been commanded to go, in the character of a Prophet, to Nineveh, and to denounce the judgments of God against that unrighteous city. Dissatisfied with this commission, from the apprehension of the trouble or danger which
it

it might involve, he declined to obey it, and directed his course another way, taking his passage in a ship that was going to Tarshish. But the displeasure of God pursued him in this voyage. A great tempest arose ; and the mariners learning from himself who he was, and the errand of disobedience on which he went, threw him into the sea, as a propitiation to still its raging *.

Delivered from this danger, by a special interposition of Heaven, the word of God came unto him the second time, that he should go to Nineveh, and declare to its inhabitants the threatenings of the Almighty. And now, remembering the chastisement he had incurred by his former disobedience, he no longer resisted the divine command. He went to Nineveh, and cried, saying, ' Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed ! ' The people of Nineveh hearkened to the awful denunciation, ' and proclaimed

* Jonah i. 2. &c.

‘proclaimed a fast, and humbled themselves, from the greatest of them to the least of them.’ And God saw their works, that they turned them from their evil, and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not *.

There arose, on this occasion, a very improper feeling in the mind of Jonah. He had been made, contrary to his inclination, the messenger of vengeance to a large and populous city; and having sacrificed his indolence and selfishness to the divine command, he hoped that at least the credit of his prophetic character would be established by the accomplishment of the threatening he had denounced. The mercy shewn to Nineveh, therefore, displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry; and he thus expressed his anger unto the Lord. ‘I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? there-

* Jonah iii. 10.

‘ therefore I fled before thee unto Tarshish,
‘ for I knew that thou art a gracious God,
‘ and merciful, slow to anger, and of great
‘ kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.
‘ Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech
‘ thee, my life from me, for it is better for
‘ me to die than to live *.’

In this very unbecoming frame of mind,
Jonah retired to a little distance from Ni-
neveh, disdaining, as it would seem, to ac-
cept shelter in a place that had been made
the occasion of affronting his pride. There
he made a booth, and sat under it, in the
shadow, till he might see what would be-
come of the city. While, in this situation,
he yielded himself to his wayward passions,
it pleased the Almighty still farther to buf-
fet his proud spirit. In seeming compliance
with his desire of accommodation, ‘ the
‘ Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it
‘ come up over Jonah, that it might be a
‘ shadow over his head to deliver him from
‘ his

* Jonah iv. 2. 3.

his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.' He had now found means, as he thought, to indulge his affronted pride, in some consistence with his selfishness and love of ease. His booth or tent would in a few days be covered with the spreading leaves of this luxuriant plant ; so that, secure, at once, from the piercing blast and the scorching ray, he might wait till he saw his desire on Nineveh. ' But God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the morning rose the next day, that God prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat on the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, it is better for me to die than to live.'

I will take occasion, from this passage of sacred history, to inquire into the causes which in general give rise to that Disrelish of Life which is inconsistent with its proper duties and enjoyments. In doing this, it is not my intention to speak of that
horrible

horrible and desperate state of mind which leads to the commission of the last and irreparable act of human rashness. It is perhaps expedient to leave this subject enveloped in the forbidding gloom that naturally surrounds it. I mean only to mark the fainter shades of these dark passions; to describe those languid and irksome feelings which bedim the scenes of life, and tinge its prospects with a sickly hue. Of these I will endeavour to trace the principal sources; and, as I go along, to point out the remedies we ought to apply against them.

I am aware that the subject is not of the same universal application with many others that might be chosen. A great part of mankind, doomed to unceasing labour, for the mere support of life, never know a languid interval of time. Unconscious of a wish for aught beyond the necessities of life, they rise with alacrity to perform their accustomed task; in the intervals of their labour, they eat their dry morsel with contentment; and, at the close of the day,
their

their 'sleep is sweet, whether they have eat
'much or little.' Their simple feelings
rise not against the even current that car-
ries them along. To them each day passes
with no more than its own burden; and
to them, when their minds are imbued
with Religion, the weekly day of rest is a
pure and happy festival, far excelling the
banquets of the idle and luxurious. It is a
seasoning to their existence here, and a
preparation for the world to come.

There are also, in the less laborious situ-
ations of life, many so unrefined in their
taste, that the flattest pleasures of sense af-
ford them all the enjoyment of which they
have any desire or conception. These, too,
must be unconscious of any application of
this subject to themselves.—It is in the
modes of artificial life that this disease is
chiefly generated. But the modes of arti-
ficial life prevail so much, that he who ad-
verts not to them in the course of religious
admonition, must overlook, in a great de-
gree, the prevailing character of the times.

But

But, that our way may be cleared towards the main inquiry we propose, it is proper to observe, in the

First place, that deep and continued adversity is apt to break down the firmest spirit. A certain portion of suffering belongs to the lot of all men ; and, unless our minds be prepared to encounter this, we are ill fitted, indeed, for our situation on earth. But there are some who appear to be peculiarly marked out as the children of affliction. They were born, perhaps, to fair prospects in life, surrounded with numerous and respectable connections, and fitted by their own talents for acting an useful and honourable part in society. But an inauspicious influence has blasted all this promising bloom. Death has thinned the props of their youth ; various misfortunes have wasted their expected inheritance ; and they find themselves in a station, barring them, by the prejudices connected with it, from labouring with their hands to provide the accommodations of life. Many a fruitless

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plan

plan have they devised to advance their condition ; often have they been on the very brink of their hopes : But still, in an unfortunate moment, the tide has turned, and thrown their prospects as far back as ever. Long has the ardour of their mind born them up under repeated strokes of calamity ; but an insensible waste of inward vigour steals on them ; they see, with growing dejection, ' the clouds returning after ' the rain ;' grief consumes them like a moth ; they pine in friendless, neglected woe ; and are at last led to say, in the bitterness of their soul, ' It is better for me ' to die than to live.'—' Wherefore is light ' given to them who are in misery, whose ' way is hid, and whom God hath hedged ' in ; who long for death, but it cometh ' not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures*?

It seems vain to think of any worldly considerations fitted to support the mind in such

* Job. iii. 20. 21.

such a case as this. But perhaps Philosophy has some cordial in store. *To man, (we are told) is allotted a mixed destiny of good and evil, and his province it is to accommodate himself to his situation by the exercise of wisdom and fortitude. He must learn to look on pain, and sickness, and poverty, as circumstances that cannot affect the composure of a wise man; and, after he has thus struggled through his few and evil days, he is to lay himself down in the dust for ever.*—And are these all the words of comfort with which Philosophy teaches us to sooth the griefs of mortality? Alas! they are vain words; and the feelings of those who retail them, when their own souls are concerned, fully detect their vanity. The only hope that can support the mind in such a case, is that ‘which entereth within the vail,’ and realizes the compensations of the world to come, where Lazarus is now fully comforted for all the miseries he once endured, and where all who, like him, possessed their souls in patience, and meekly

meekly waited for the issues of Providence, are now happy for ever, in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

Besides personal suffering, there is a more delicate and respectable feeling, which sometimes produces Disrelish of Life.

The scenery of nature is lovely, and the duties of life are interesting. But much of the delight and interest we take in them arises from social feelings;—from the sympathies of the heart,—from the habits of entire confidence with those to whom we can tell how lovely and interesting they are.—Suppose them torn from us,—the altered prospect is tinged with gloom; the groves no longer rejoice; the course of life seems flat and unprofitable:—All is desolate and vacant.

Let the sorrow of the world go unpitied; let avarice and ambition be mortified: There is no reason to bewail the disappointment of selfish and unsocial passions. But we will follow the virtuous mourner to the grave

grave of his friend, we will mingle our tears with his, and speak to him of immortality. We will bid him go back to the business of life, not to learn a dull and frozen apathy, but to apply the remedy which Providence has prescribed to the overwhelmed spirit, to do the work that was given him by his Maker, and calmly expect the restoration of virtuous connections in a better world.

But, though it was necessary to mention these sources of Disrelish to Life, yet the subject rather leads me to consider it in the light of an inward disease affecting the mind itself. I proceed, therefore, to observe, in the

Second place, that this feeling often arises out of the very abundance of enjoyment. The children of adversity seem to think that they only can speak of the burden of existence. They are at a loss to imagine what should discolour the scenes of it to the opulent and prosperous. Were they in this envied condition, no languid feeling, they

they think, would ever find admission into their breasts ; no peevish complaint would ever escape from their lips. This, however, is a very delusive idea. Who are the persons that have held the most querulous language on the subject of human life ? Have they been always of the suffering part of mankind ? Nay, is not the reverse the case ? Have not these complaints been uttered more frequently, and with more bitterness of invective, by the prosperous and wealthy, who seem to have all that their hearts could wish ? There is often, in the lowest depths of distress, a secret cordial of hope that relieves the burden of misery. On the dark ground of adversity, the transient gleams of bliss glow with brighter colours than on the gay tenor of a prosperous life. The poor man's banquet, though a rare, is yet a high and unmixed delight. The thought of it enlivens many days ; the tale of it lasts a pleasing theme till it returns. Even the bed of languishing seasons the joy of returning health.

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The wretch who lately knew no other wish at *morn*, than the return of *even*, and at *even* than the return of *morn*, now exults in the happiest feelings of gratitude and joy. To him Nature again puts on the robe of youth, and is decked out in fragrant beauties from the womb of the morning.

It is not so with the envied sons of prosperity. They often languish amidst the daily round of their enjoyments. In vain has Providence administered to them an overflowing cup from the spring of pleasure. The full soul loathes the honeycomb. The satiated and splenetic mind spurns at the abundance of its enjoyments. The salt of life has lost its favour, and wherewithal shall it again be seasoned?—It must be seasoned by temperance and self-controul. Ye who possess the materials of earthly pleasure, wring them not to the dregs, else a bitter residue will rise, and poison all the draught.—It must be seasoned by cultivating a taste for delights superior to those of sense. Are ye so dull as to perceive no
sources

sources of pleasure in contemplating the fair fabrick of Nature? Has science no charms for you? Is the page of history insipid? Is there no balm in friendship? no recreation in the rational converse of souls? —It must be seasoned by Religion. Return from these cisterns ye have hewn out for yourselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Return to God, the only fountain of happiness. He will put gladness into your hearts, more than you ever received from the abundance of corn and wine. Go to him as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. Tell him of the sad blank you find within, and he will fill it up with the blessings of his covenant. Tell him of that tormenting thirst which the cup of earthly pleasures cannot quench, and he will give you to drink of living water, which shall refresh your exhausted sensations of outward happiness, and be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life. In the

Third

Third place, Disrelish of Existence often proceeds from a cause connected with the former, viz. INACTIVITY. If we look through all the conditions of life, we shall not find a single individual who is happy without being employed in some business that interests his heart and affections. In vain do misguided mortals seek for bliss in the absence of labour and solicitude, in the bosom of indolence and thoughtless repose. Misery is the inevitable portion of the vacant inactive mind. The infinite copiousness of Nature, with all the combinations of art, cannot afford a variety of objects sufficient to gratify its sickly and capricious longings. 'The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.' Great labour is appointed for every man; and this yoke is upon all the sons of Adam; from him that sitteth on a throne of glory, unto him that is humbled in earth and ashes; from him that weareth purple and a crown, unto him that is clothed with a linen

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‘ linen frock *.’ They who accommodate themselves to this decree, by employing their time and faculties in useful pursuits, find the only true enjoyment in this state of pilgrimage. No languor or discontent embitters their hours. That time which sits so heavy on the idle and voluptuous is by them twice enjoyed ; first, in the pleasant ardours of an active mind, and afterwards in the delightful consciousness of having acted agreeably to their nature, and to the will of God. But, upon whom does the heavy hand of spleen and melancholy lie ? Upon those mistaken mortals, who know not, or who try to alter this decree of heaven ; who would substitute the giddy round of dissipation instead of the pure and steady pleasures which a well disciplined mind reaps in the paths of duty ; upon those mistaken mortals who have drunk too greedily of the cup of sensual pleasure, and destroyed their relish of the calm satisfactions of life.

Is there any among us, then, who complains

* Ecclesiasticus xlv. 1.—4.

plains of the oppression of time, of the languid uniformity of life? Let him relinquish the vain attempt of finding artificial means to enliven it; let him cease to blame Providence; let him bend his attention on himself, and examine the state of his mind with respect to the sense of duty that actuates it. Are there any of the obligations of life which you dislike, and which, of consequence, you habitually neglect to perform? Do you withdraw yourselves, like Jonah, from the divine command, and, instead of going to Nineveh, take your passage in a ship to Tarshish;—a tempest will arise in your bosom; you will make shipwreck of your happiness; melancholy, and every black passion, will haunt you. Know ye not, ye indolent and slothful, that, while ye build your airy castles, the materials of life's happiness are lying unhewn and unarranged around you? Know ye not that you are destroying that healthful state of your souls, which alone gives a true relish to the pleasures of life? Awake
from

from this sickly dream. Awake, and trace back the causes which have so far unhinged your inward frame, as to produce the Disrelish of Being. Lay aside sloth and voluptuousness, those weights of the soul, and endeavour, through the Divine assistance, to restore discipline within. Remember that Life was not given us to live to ourselves, to our own selfish or vain desires ; but to live to God, and to our fellow creatures ; and remember also, that death can only be happy when it is the end of a life thus consecrated. In the

Fourth place, PRIDE is often the source of that Disrelish of Life which we are considering. There is a proper regard due to ourselves ; a veneration for the noble powers of our mind ; and a firm contempt of every thing that could degrade us in our own esteem. To maintain this loftiness of mind to the utmost, involves nothing either criminal or unbecoming. But there are other considerations of comparative dignity which more easily enter into the minds of
men.

men. The distinctions which birth and fortune have made among us, as members of society, often swell the mind with inordinate vanity. In the most prosperous state of life, this disposition is a source of numberless torments. Haman had been advanced by the King of Persia to the greatest honours, and had his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the King's servants bowed and revered Haman; for the King had so commanded concerning him. One thing only was wanting to his felicity. A single individual, of a despised nation, bowed not, nor did him reverence. Could this be of any consequence to the man whom the King delighted to honour? Yes, it rankled in his proud heart, and embittered all his joys; so that, 'when he came home, he sent and 'called for his friends, and Haman told 'them of the glory of his riches, and the 'multitude of his children, and all the 'things wherein the King had promoted 'him, and how he had advanced him above

' the

' the princes and servants of the King. Ha-
 ' man said, moreover, Yea Esther the Queen
 ' did let no man come in with the King
 ' unto the banquet but myself, and to-mor-
 ' row am I invited unto her also with the
 ' King. Yet all this availeth me nothing,
 ' so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting
 ' at the King's gate *.' While pride thus
 taints the sources of happiness, even in the
 midst of prosperity, it is still more baneful
 when it adds its poison to the arrows of ad-
 versity. There is no balm to soften the
 wounds of the proud spirit. It disdains the
 refuge of meekness and resignation ; it re-
 sists and struggles even under the hand of
 God. Thus did Jonah. His pride had been
 offended, because the message of wrath
 with which he was entrusted had not
 been carried into effect against Nineveh.
 ' Therefore, now, O Lord, (said he),
 ' take, I beseech thee, my life from me, for
 ' it is better for me to die than to live †.'

And

* Esther vi. 10.—13.

† Jonah iv. 3.

And shall man, the child of dust, the heir of guilt and corruption, stand upon these indignant terms with his Maker? Shall his bosom swell with tumultuous passions? And will he venture even to avow his impatient feelings, and say, 'I do well to be angry?' Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish mortals, rash and ungrateful! Declare the reasons on account of which you undervalue the gift of Life. State those claims on your Maker, the neglect of which you resent so keenly. Has he profited by your righteousness? Have you given unto him, and it shall be requited you again? Nay, rather remember the days of old, the years of many generations, how, from the days of our fathers, we have all gone astray, and forsaken the paths of righteousness. Commune with your own hearts and be still. Think on the original forfeiture of mankind in the transgression of our first parents; think on the many offences by which each of us has forfeited happiness for himself, and let not repining thoughts,

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on account of the blessings that have been withdrawn, lead you to overlook the many undeserved gifts of Providence which still remain in your lot. 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins * ?' 'We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live †?'

In the *last* place, Disrelish of Existence often proceeds from DELUSIVE IDEAS with regard to our state on earth. The imagination has been early impressed with more flattering views of life than experience has ever realized. The hope has been fondly entertained, that all its scenes would be interesting and delightful. In the progress of our days, we find this to have been an ill founded expectation. The glowing colours which fancy had spread are tarnished, and fade away. Even in the most laudable

* Lament. iii. 39.

† Hebrews xii. 9.

laudable pursuits, hours of languor, and despondence, and sickening thought, at times, oppress the mind, and impair its healthful ardour. The scene, once so bright and lovely, is darkened by selfish passions, jarring interests, and anxious cares. Life seems running to its dregs ere it be well begun; and the heart ceases to take any interest in all that is done under heaven.

These mistaken views of life are in many cases produced by the fictitious representations of it, which are read with so much avidity by the young. In these writings, the professed object is, that the whole train of events shall be interesting, and that nothing flat or ordinary shall dismiss the attention from the well wrought tale. This solicitude, however conformable to the rules of Criticism, produces, I am afraid, a very false picture of human life; and I suspect the consequence of it, in many cases, to have been, that, in *real life*, the attention has languished in all those parts of it which, in order to become interesting, must

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be filled up with ordinary duties. It is far more pleasing to the imagination to resolve on acting an heroic part, in rare and trying conjunctures, than to acquit ourselves with steady perseverance in the common duties of our stations. We must rectify these mistaken views, if we would enjoy the real happiness of life. We must correct our florid and gaudy prospects, and bring them down to the reality of our state here as 'pilgrims and strangers, as all our fathers have been.' Above all, we must learn to view this life as a portion of eternity, and as that portion of it which must determine, as to us, all that is to come. In this view, no part of present existence can be uninteresting; and, to those who have 'good hope through grace,' no part of it can be thoroughly wretched. It is Religion alone,—it is the Religion of Jesus alone, that can reconcile us to all the vicissitudes of life, to its cares, and labours, and trials, and afflictions; so that, 'though troubled on every side, we are not distressed; though perplexed,

* plexed, not in despair ; persecuted, but
* not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroy-
* ed *.' ' For our light affliction, which is
* but for a moment, worketh out for us a
* far more exceeding and eternal weight of
* glory. While we look not at the things
* which are seen, but at the things which
* are not seen ; for the things which are
* seen are temporal, but the things which
* are not seen are eternal †.'

* 2 Corinth. iv. 8. 9.

† Ibid. 17. 18.

SERMON

S E R M O N IV.

ON THE SENSE OF THE DIVINE PRE-
SENCE.

PSALMS xvi. 8. 9.

*I have set the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not
be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and
my glory rejoiceth ; my flesh also shall rest
in hope.*

IN these words David declares the constant regard he had to the Divine presence, and the happy influence which this sentiment had on his mind. It preserved him unmoved amidst the TEMPTATIONS
and

and TROUBLES of life ;—it filled his heart with perpetual CHEERFULNESS in the present time :—It inspired him with GOOD HOPE as to every future period of his being.

From these ideas, which are obviously suggested in the text, I am led,

First, To explain what is meant by setting the Lord always before us ;

Secondly, To illustrate the advantages that would arise from it in the particular views stated by the Psalmist.

First, To set the Lord always before us implies a firm persuasion of the being of God, of his infinite perfections, and of the moral government which he exerciseth over the world.

This is the foundation of all Religion, both natural and revealed. ‘ He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently

'gently seek him. Know ye that the Lord
'he is God; it is he that made us, and
'not we ourselves. In him we live, and
'move, and have our being, and he is not
'far from every one of us.'

To set the Lord always before us, is to be habitually impressed with the infinite perfections of his nature;—his almighty power, unerring wisdom, spotless purity, unchangeable justice, goodness, and truth. It is to consider these attributes as at all times employed in the administration of the world; regarding our conduct in it as moral agents; and preparing the present mixed appearances in Providence to bring forth at last an equal and conspicuous retribution to every one of us, according to the deeds done in the body. It implies more than a THEORETICAL belief of the truths that have been stated, which may often lie dormant in the understanding, without any effect on practice. The opinions adopted by the mind must give rise to feelings that interest the heart; and these feelings must regulate

regulate the habits and associations of thought, in such a manner, that even the common occurrences of life, and the ordinary objects which present themselves to our senses, shall raise our thoughts to the presiding Power and Godhead. He whose mind is thus trained meets with God every where; and converses with his wisdom and goodness, 'when he sitteth in the house, 'and when he walks by the way; when 'he lies down, and when he rises up.'

There is not an object in nature, either minute or stupendous, that does not remind him of the great First Cause, who reared the whole, and formed every part in order and proportion. There is not a vicissitude of the elements that does not lead his attention upwards to the Lord on high, who hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm, who prepares the rain, the dew, and the sunshine, who gives beauty and variety to Nature, by the stated return of seasons, according to his own faithful ordinance. The events in society, the business of the world,

world, the passions of men, and the tumults of the people, lead him upwards to God, who has the hearts of all men in his hands, 'and turneth them whithersoever he will, as the rivers of water.'

Were he abstracted from all outward objects, his own frame, the structure of his body, and the faculties of his mind, would impress him with the thought of God. It would arise from considering the structure of his body. 'I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them *.' The powers of his mind, and the rank he thereby possesses in creation,

* Psalms cxxii. 14.—16.

creation, produce a similar reflection.

‘What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour*.’

The train of his remembrance, as an individual, is no less associated with the thought of God. ‘How precious have been thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand†.’ The powers of his fancy are under the same controlling impression; for even it cannot explore regions where God is not. ‘If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me ‡.’

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* Psalms v. 4. 5.

† Psalms cxxxix. 17. 18.

‡ Ibid. 8.—10.

In a word, to set the Lord always before us, is to have his being and perfections, though not always directly in our mind, yet so associated with the objects and events which pass before us, that it may ever be at hand, as the predominant principle which directs our lives. I proceed, in the

Second place, to illustrate the advantages that would arise from setting the Lord always before us in the particular views stated by the Psalmist,

First, He declares his persuasion that he would thereby be kept steady amid the temptations and troubles of life. 'Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.' Let us begin with considering the influence of it as a safeguard against TEMPTATION. And surely, of all the sentiments inspired by Religion, that of the universal presence of God is the most fitted, in this respect, to command and overawe the mind. Other considerations apply separately to particular branches of conduct. This comprehends the whole, and bears with

with all its weight on every part. Whoever is thoroughly impressed with this great truth must necessarily feel the universal obligation to purity in thought, affection, and motive, as well as in outward conduct. To all the temptations by which he can be solicited, he has this ready and obvious answer, 'Shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?' Is not he who fills all space still nearest to me, as the infallible witness of my conduct? What though I be retired from all human view? there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, that can conceal me from God. 'All things are naked and open before him; to him the night shineth as the day.'

To venture deliberately on transgression, while such reflections as these occupy the mind, is probably a rare degree of impiety. It is by banishing the sense of God that men become bold and hardened in iniquity. Of habitual and deliberate sinners, indeed, those only seem to act a consistent part who have thrown off the belief of a God, or at least

least the belief of his moral government, and of a future state of retribution. The unbeliever has, on his own supposition, no consequences of his wickedness to apprehend, excepting those which may befall him in the present life. If, by any means, he can escape these, his end is attained, since, after death, he expects to be for ever insensible of either happiness or misery. Deplorable, indeed, and seemingly hopeless, is the state of such men's minds. They are not far from utter perdition. May God awaken and convert them!—Still, however, the part they act is more consistent with itself, than the deliberate wickedness of those who believe that there is a God, who now observes, and who will finally call them to account for their conduct. This is surely the most astonishing and inexplicable fact that human nature exhibits. In the presence of a fellow creature, respectable for wisdom and goodness, the man can hardly be found who will venture on a grossly indecent action. The very inspection

tion of a child has been known to startle the sinner, and to retard, if not to prevent, the execution of his criminal purpose. And shall the aspect of a good man, though unarmed with authority, nay, of a child, who can hardly distinguish between good and evil, have such an ascendancy over us as to check the career of passion, and for a time repel the violence of temptation? How much more must a sense of the presence of that great and awful Being, who is not only the witness of our conduct, but our supreme Lawgiver and Judge, restrain us from every thing that is offensive in his sight?

But the temptations which arise from our own headstrong passions are not the only sources of guilty conduct. The maxims, and the example of those with whom we live, often lead us to 'do evil with the multitude;' and the danger of this influence is greatly heightened by the loose principles of morality which prevail in the present times. The education of youth, instead of fortifying

fortifying them with principles to withstand the spreading torrent of licentiousness, proceeds too much on an avowed system of conformity to reigning manners. They are early taught the poisonous doctrine, that those who have to converse with mankind must accommodate themselves to their notions and practices, and, in the great train of life, follow the maxims, or at least the habits, of the rest of the world. To enforce these pernicious instructions, the dread of ridicule and reproach is held out ; singularity is represented as more culpable than vice ; and the fear of man is opposed to the fear of God. The weak and timid fall into the snare. Moved by these apprehensions, they are led, in numberless instances, to act in opposition to conscience, nay even to *inclination*. Whoever has observed the course of the world, must assent to the truth of this remark ; and whoever has reflected on his own feelings, must acknowledge that it requires more than ordinary resolution to resist the influence of
such

Such temptations, and to continue determined in a virtuous singularity, at the hazard both of reputation and interest. Surely, then, the most effectual security against this dangerous snare, is to set the Lord always before us. Conscious that he approves, and assured that he will support the cause of goodness, though the world should combine to oppress it, the fear of man, the fear of his ridicule, reproaches, and injuries, will banish from before our eyes.

Such are the advantages of setting the Lord always before us, considered as a safeguard against temptation. Let us now consider it as a support under TROUBLE; for this idea may be supposed to have been also in the mind of the Psalmist when he said, 'Because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved.'

The state of man is at best a state of solicitude and uncertainty. In his most favourable circumstances, he can reckon on no confirmed happiness; he can never say, without presumption, 'My mountain stand-
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'eth strong, I shall never be moved.' On a mind destitute of religion, the unpleasant changes of life fall with tenfold weight. The worldly man is then overwhelmed with grief, disappointment, and impatience. He either sees not the hand that dispenses his sufferings, or he hardens himself against it. He flies to every unhallowed resource, every broken cistern of worldly comfort; and, when none of these can afford him any relief, his proud and rebellious heart, rankling in sullen grief, resists and struggles, even under the hand of God.

Very different from this are the effects of affliction on the man who sets the Lord always before him. To him, indeed, as well as to the other, 'no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous but grievous;' but his mind is open to humble, pious, and consoling views. He remembers his own evil ways; he acknowledges his former abuse of the favours of Heaven; he gratefully numbers the blessings that still remain in his lot; he commits himself

himself to God, and meekly waits the issues of Providence. To him the reasoning of the Apostle is a constant source of patient, nay of cheerful submission. 'We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence, shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily, for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness *.' In the sufferings he is called to endure, he is thus led to see the tokens of a father's love, the pledges of glorious promises, the discipline that trains him to the perfection and felicity of his nature. Such are the sentiments with which the adverse changes of life inspire the man who sets the Lord always before him. He knows 'that affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring from the ground.' He has utterly
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* Hebrews xii. 9. 10.

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banished from his mind the idea of chance or accident in any of the events of time, and is fully persuaded that all things are ordered by that God, who is wise in counsel, as well as mighty in strength. This consideration over-rules every murmuring thought, and restrains every impatient expression.—‘It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good *.’

Hitherto we have considered the advantage of setting the Lord always before us in respect to the trying conjunctures of life,—**TEMPTATION**, and **SUFFERING**. But life may be considered in another view, as the succession of such ordinary occurrences as do not interest our feelings in any high degree. From the repetition of similar scenes, and the insipid return of palling pleasures, the most prosperous condition on earth cannot exempt its owner. ‘The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.’ Something

is still wanting to renew the impaired ardour of the mind, and to refresh the faded sensations of outward happiness.—David declares that he had found the cordial seasoning of life, in ‘setting the Lord always before him.’ ‘Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.’

That there is a providence on high, which over-rules the destiny of men, is a truth generally acknowledged. But many of those who entertain this general belief pay little attention to it, excepting in singular and striking occurrences. In the ordinary train of things, they live without *faith*, and consequently without that perpetual source of consolation which *faith* affords. Religious views are a resource to them in those emergencies to which no other considerations will apply. In other cases, they think and feel on the same confined scale with the men of the world. The consequence is, that, in the first case, they are exposed to the errors and extravagances of Enthusiasm; in the last, to a languid and feeble application

application of the religious principle to the common duties and situations of life. The remedy against both of these extremes is to 'set the Lord always before us,' not only when his hand is revealed in broad and manifest tokens, but in the calm and regular course of his common Providence. This will be a source of perpetual equanimity and cheerfulness. It will sweeten every passing moment, and brighten every surrounding scene.—Consider the delight which is communicated to all outward objects by the presence of a friend whom we love and esteem. With such a companion, we forget all lapse of time, all circumstances of place; every situation is pleasing, if it only furnish this enjoyment; and, in remembrance, every spot is interesting with which the object of our affection is associated. Why then should not all nature appear delightful to the upright mind, considered as the temple of God, the seat of his universal presence?

We

We behold a great and glorious scene :
The sun, the moon, and the stars ; their
wide orbits, inconceivable, in one respect,
by the widest range of fancy, yet subject
to computation, as to every use in life, and
obvious, in their beneficial influence, to the
meanest capacity : The globe we inhabit,
connected with an extensive system of per-
fect regularity, furnished, in all respects,
for convenience, adorned in all respects for
beauty : But it is presiding Benevolence
that decorates this marvellous scene with its
most engaging charms. ' The LORD reign-
' eth, let the earth rejoice, let the multi-
' tude of the isles be glad thereof *.' GOD
is the light of the sun, the original glory
and Majesty of nature. Suppose him ab-
sent,—suppose the FATHER OF THE UNI-
VERSE gone, and what are we but orphans,
friendless and destitute, wandering in a
' land of darkness, as darkness itself, and of
' the shadow of death, without any order?

It is only when the universe is consider-

* Psalms xcvi. 1.

ed as the empire of God, created by his infinite power, governed by his unerring wisdom, and full of his diffusive goodness, that it appears every where, and in all aspects delightful. Without this commanding thought, Nature is by turns enlivening or depressing in its aspects, as clouds or sunshine invest the firmament: But no such vicissitudes affect the inward serenity of the man who sets the Lord always before him. Assured of the friendship of his Creator, his mind dwells on high, above the tumult of the elements, in the everlasting calm which surrounds the pavilion of the Almighty.

While a regard to the divine presence produces this serene possession of the mind amidst the varying scenes which surround us, it also inspires alacrity in the performance of every duty that results from our relations in life. With the wide compass of human obligations, many different natural feelings are connected. To the performance of some we are prompted by original instinct.

‘ Can

‘ Can a mother forget her sucking child,
‘ that she should not have compassion on
‘ the son of her womb * ?’ Motives to the
performance of others arise from the im-
mediate pleasure or advantage connected
with them, from a regard to our reputa-
tion, peace, and general well being in soci-
ety. But there are also obligations recom-
mended only by the consciousness of duty ;
obligations which involve self-denial, the
sacrifice of vanity, and opposition to pre-
sent feelings. Such instances not only oc-
cur at times ; there is also a general obli-
gation to self-denial, as part of the disci-
pline of Religion. A regard to the divine
presence not only enforceth these obliga-
tions, but gives the heart an interest in the
performance of them. It not only enlivens
the flat scenes, but sweetens the laborious
duties of life. What an encouragement is
it to steady and persevering virtue, that,
though the scene of it were but a cottage,
and

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and its exertions entirely hid from men, yet God sees, approves, and will finally reward it? In this consideration, there is a perpetual source of fervour, cheerfulness, and alacrity, in the paths of duty.

In the *last* place, the Psalmist declares, that a constant regard to the presence of God inspired him with good hope as to every future period of his being. ‘My flesh also shall rest in hope.’ Few and evil are the days of our pilgrimage on earth. Yet a little while and all of us shall go whence we shall not return. ‘Man dieth, and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?’ It is undoubtedly alarming to our natural feelings to think that these material tabernacles shall be dissolved, that our union with visible Nature shall be broken; above all, that we shall be introduced into the presence of our Judge, and receive our unalterable doom. But, if we have set the Lord constantly before us, in all the previous

vious conjunctures of life, these clouds which hang over its last scene shall be skirted with a cheerful beam of departing day. 'Our flesh shall rest in hope; the clods of the valley shall be sweet unto it; the grave shall be a hiding place until the wrath be overpast, until the dust to which it is reduced shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and live.'

Let us therefore now begin to cultivate that habit of thought, which will enable us, in the awful crisis, when the sun and the moon are darkened, when the shades of death lower, and Jordan's billows roar, to say with the triumphant Apostle, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' 'I have set the Lord always before me. He has been my confidence and my rock from my youth upwards, and now I know that he will not forsake me in the vanishing of my days. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' What though my spirit

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take its flight to climes unknown ? there is no region of infinite space where God is not.—What though my flesh go down to the grave and see corruption ? ‘ I know
‘ that my Redeemer liveth, and though,
‘ after my skin, worms shall destroy this
‘ body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.’

SERMON

S E R M O N V.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF A RELIGIOUS
LIFE.

PROVERBS xxiii. 17. 18. •

*Let not thine heart envy sinners : But be
thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.
For surely there is an end, and thine expect-
ation shall not be cut off.*

EVERY pursuit in which we engage
from choice affords pleasure for a
time. The ardour produced by novelty
may be observed in all the feelings, and in
all the enterprizes of men, in their most se-
rious concerns, as well as in their most tri-
fling pleasures ; in the pursuits which re-
late

late to time, and in those which relate to eternity.

The objects presented by Religion are at *first*, like all others, embraced by the mind with keen affection.—Newly disengaged from sensual or worldly attachments, we set out with alacrity in the ways of wisdom, and travel the first stages with cheerfulness and vigour. But, on this early animation, little dependence is to be placed. The road, at first so smooth and delightful, becomes steep and rugged as we proceed. The sky, so serene when we began our journey, lowers and blackens over our heads. The waters are not always still by our side, nor the pastures ever green and luxuriant around us. Offended by these disappointments, we are apt to imagine that they are peculiar to a life of Religion. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we remember the full banquets, but forget the bondage of the land of Egypt. Hence our first ardour cools, our steps become languid, and the land of promise appears at a hopeless distance. Sick
of

of deferred expectation, and impatient to gather the harvest before the due season, we are tempted to 'envy sinners' in their enjoyment of present pleasures, and to think them happier than those whom the 'fear of the Lord restrains all the day long.'

Were we enticed into the service of God by the hopes of present indulgence, the contrary experience might justly offend our feelings. But, as no such flattering expectations are held out to us, as the divine Author of our religion has plainly forewarned us to lay our account with many difficulties, and painful circumstances, designed for the trial and establishment of our virtue, it is evidently our own fault if these, when they arrive, either surprise or disgust us. We are nowhere told that Religion is to alter the outward condition of human nature. There is no promise to its disciples that the ordinary course of Providence shall be interrupted, for the sake of favouring their present interest. Its great object is to reduce our minds under proper discipline ;

line; and, by the ministry of those sufferings of which we complain, to raise us to an excellence of character unattainable by any other means. Now is the season of strenuous contest, and persevering labour; but 'surely there is an end, and the expectation of those who endure to the end shall not be cut off.'

The wise man's intention, in the words of the text, is evidently to encourage the servants of God to steadfastness in a life of Religion, by the view of the certain compensation, which they shall in the end receive for all the self-denial they may be called to exercise in the present time. But it will not be a great departure from this intention, if we begin by inquiring whether, even now, there be any reason to let our hearts envy sinners, reserving the consideration of the END to which the text directs our view to close the general argument in favour of a Religious life.

In conducting this inquiry, it is evident that we must compare a Religious life, not
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with a life altogether free from suffering; but with such a life as sinners or worldly men commonly pass.

I. Unpleasant circumstances must occur in human life, whatever be the plan on which it is conducted. The bodies of men are subject to diseases; their minds to depression; their schemes are liable to be disappointed; their friends die; their own faculties decay; and the evil days in which they have no pleasure overtake them, whether they live in the fear of God, or in the habits of sin. All these circumstances pertain to the common lot of humanity, independently of the character of individuals.—Under some very oppressive afflictions, indeed, the servants of God have at times become envious of the foolish, and have imagined that they were not in trouble, as other men are. But the utmost that can be said on this head is, that
' All things come alike to all; one event
' to the righteous and to the wicked; to
' the good, and to the clean and to the un-
' clean;

‘clean ; to him that sacrificeth and to him
‘that sacrificeth not *.’ Even this proposition is to be understood with a limitation which daily experience suggests. The natural tendencies of human conduct may be counteracted and overpowered by extraordinary occurrences. ‘The race is not all
‘ways to the swift, nor the battle to the
‘strong ; neither yet bread to the wise, nor
‘riches to men of understanding †.’ But surely these qualities are not therefore to be despised, as though they were not fitted generally to attain their respective objects. In like manner, the servants of God may, and often do, suffer the sharpest afflictions of this life, poverty, disease, and friendless wretchedness. But religion is not the cause (at least in the present times) of these sufferings. On the contrary, by producing habits of industry and temperance, it is rather calculated to shield us from them. Let us weigh the sufferings to which
virtue

* Eccles. ix. 2.

† Ibid. 11.

virtue is *incidentally exposed*; against those which folly and vice produce by *their own tendency*. Put in the one scale poverty, sickness, pain, may add reproach and persecution;—only let a good conscience shed its alleviating influence over them;—put in the other the same outward evils, excepting *persecution*, but, instead of it, add the burden of *remorse*;—and the wisdom of Religion, even for the present time, will be demonstrated on considerations of pure selfishness.

The truth is, unmixed happiness was not designed to be the portion of men dwelling on earth. The very idea of it is inconsistent with that of a state of discipline. That measure of happiness which is possible to be enjoyed in such a state, Religion alone can confer. For the tendency of true Religion is to calm our turbulent passions, to moderate our impetuous desires, to soothe our inevitable sorrows. By this discipline of the mind, we make the nearest approach to happiness; yet still it is but an *approach*; and that which is wanting is just equal to

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the difference between a state in which we are *tried*,—and a state in which *tried obedience* receives its reward.

So far then the way is cleared towards a fair and candid estimate of the sufferings peculiar to a Religious life, with the view of inquiring whether they be such as should lead us to *envy sinners*. It is acknowledged that the godly man is not without troubles, which arise from his peculiar character and pursuits. But, let us be impartial. Let us review all the conditions of life; let us consult every class of *sinners*; let us ask the votaries of every worldly plan of action—the ambitious, the sensual, the vain—Are they free from disquietudes peculiar to their various pursuits? Have not thousands of them confessed the contrary? Has not the world been importuned with their complaints ever since men had a being on it?—It is only in some rare and passing situations that any superiority of enjoyment seems to be on the side of those who have cast off the restraints of Religion. When,
for

for instance, we see the young, gay, and healthful libertine, rejoicing 'in the days of his youth, walking in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes,' we are ready to ascribe a felicity to him much beyond what he enjoys. On a superficial view, his lot appears far more enviable than that of the man who is 'in the fear of the Lord all the day long,' who withholds from himself many objects of natural desire, and lives in the habits of self denied obedience. But this is a delusive comparison. Could we see the whole train of their respective feelings, a very different conclusion would be the result. Those precious tears of penitence, which now bedim the countenance of the godly man, shall soon be wiped away; his hands, which now hang down, shall be lifted up, and his feeble knees strengthened. 'He that thus goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him *.'

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* Psalms, cxxvi. 6.

His sorrows are gradually dispelled; his joys multiplied and confirmed, as he proceeds on his way. The reverse is the case with the joys and sorrows of sinners. Yet a little while, and their frantic mirth must cease, by the inevitable decay of the objects which supply it. Their sorrows must grow with the evil days, whose approach they cannot arrest, when scorns shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail.*

But, setting aside these prospects with regard to declining life, let us consider what the sinner has to boast, even as to present enjoyment, above the man whose conduct is formed on the principles of reverence for the authority of God. With respect to all the solid and valuable objects of life, the latter has at least equal advantages. It cannot be said that any precept of Religion forbids him to seek the emoluments

* Eccles. xii. 5.

of wealth by honest industry, or to enjoy the wealth he possesses in the natural and temperate use of the pleasures of life. As little can it be said that a wicked man is more certain of attaining the goods of this world, than the man who 'fears God, and escheweth evil.' Where, then, are we to look for the enviable advantages of a sinful life? Nothing seems to remain but the unrestrained indulgence of the sensual appetites. And is this, in truth, an advantage so valuable as to determine a wise man's choice? It is not surely by the delight accompanying some rare evanescent enjoyments that the happiness even of the present life is to be estimated. Independent both of Religion and Morality, *Nature* has determined the bounds of those pleasures which at once delight and recreate our frame. Beyond these bounds all is languor, vexation, and remorse. The animal part of our spirits may for a time be raised to a high and unnatural pitch, but the subsequent loathings of intemperance will more than

countervail the temporary feast of the senses. It appears, then, that there is no reason to envy sinners on the supposition that they enjoy the unalloyed pleasures of the present life, or to take exception against a life of religion, merely on account of its involving a portion of those sufferings which are inseparable from the lot of humanity.—But we may go a step further, and assert,

II. That the troubles *incident* to a life devoted to the fear of God are neither so sharp nor so numerous as those which *must be endured* in the slavery of worldly and sinful pursuits.

There is no consideration that would tend more to deter a wise man from engaging in any plan of action, than the prospect of being obliged to submit to degrading compliances, and fatiguing efforts, without any certainty of recompense. Let us examine whether this prospect be not inseparably connected with the plan of a worldly life. Is it not in general a series of

of stooping arts and humiliating submissions, which cannot fail to sink a man in his own esteem? Which of the votaries of such a life ever attained the summit of his hopes without a continued prostitution of mind to every ignoble and time-serving purpose? He that would mount the ladder of worldly ambition must in general learn to renounce every firm and unbending principle, to spread his sails to every wind, and veer with every changing current. He must study the characters of men, not with the view to change or reform them, but to accommodate himself to all their weaknesses and crimes. Many a stinging indignity he must endure; under many a protracted expectation he must linger. At last, when his laborious pursuits are accomplished, he takes possession of his dear bought eminence with a mind shattered by the agitation of tumultuous passions, and incapable of tasting the calm satisfactions of life.

Shall

Shall we say, then, that this continued prostitution of mind, embittered too by contending passions, and by the rancour of jealous competitions, is a small or trifling discouragement to such a plan of life? Let us attend to the report of those who have had the experience of it. How many invectives are there on record, by worldly men, against the very pursuits to which their lives were devoted? The history of many such men is transmitted to us. Of some we have even their own accounts. What is it in these narratives that engages our chief attention and interest? Is it not the scenes of labour, anxiety, and disappointment, through which the authors passed? These they paint in the most lively colours. But do they dwell with equal force of description on the recompense of all their toils? Are they able to carry our minds as much along with them in describing the period of their mature honours, calm enjoyments, and confirmed happiness? No; the curtain is wisely dropped

as soon as the vicissitudes of the plot are ended;—for all beyond this period is as dull as the annals of other men. Surely, if the recompense of a worldly life were equal to the previous expectation of its votaries, if it corresponded, in any degree, to the labour and anxiety with which it is earned, they would not have been all so reserved in laying this part of their history before us.

Hitherto we have supposed the successful issue of worldly pursuits. But this is not the uniform event of them. We gaze with a stupid wonder at the fortunate candidates for the prizes which the world bestows. We observe their crooked arts, and prostituted manners, with an implicit belief that they must always lead to the same success. Dazzled with the view of such instances, we forget to take into the account the multitudes who have practised these arts in vain, and ruined both soul and body in an unprofitable drudgery to the world. But these, too, ought to be considered, before

we 'let our heart envy sinners.' And ah ! how many have had this cause of complaint against the service of the world ? How many have literally spent their labour for nought, and toiled all their lives without the shadow of recompense ? They have risen early, and sat up late, and eaten the bread of carefulness, that they might earn the wages of this world, and, after all, they have earned them only to 'put them in a 'bag with holes.' 'They have sown 'much, and reaped little ; a moth has been 'in their substance, and they have no fruit 'of all their labour under the sun *.'—Let us now inquire whether the same discouraging circumstances are to be found in a life of Religion. Is it, like the service of the world, degrading to the mind ? Does it involve the same fatiguing exertions ? Is its reward equally uncertain ?

Does the Master whom the Religious man serves require from him any thing be-

* Haggai, i. 6.

low the real dignity of his nature? Does he exact dissimulation, flattery, and mean submissions, as the road to his favour?—No; his laws are the maxims of the only true honour and independence which the mind of man can attain.—Is his service oppressive and burdensome? Is it *oppressive* ‘to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk ‘humbly with our God?’ Is it a *burden* to consult the true interest of our nature, to deny ourselves ruinous indulgences, and to limit our enjoyments within those pleasures which leave no bitter residue behind?—Is his service of doubtful recompense?—When, or by whom, has this complaint ever been made?—He who seeks the rewards and honours which come from God can never miscarry in his pursuits. No accident, no malice, can defeat the object of his life. The crown for which he strives is as secure to him as the truth of the divine nature is unalterable; and the joyful issue of his labours shall as far exceed his hopes,

hopes, as worldly rewards fall short of the expectations of sinners.

To all this let it be added, that the discouraging circumstances in a religious life are chiefly felt by those who have made little progress in it. The farther we advance, the slighter they appear. Every act of self-denial renders the will more submissive, and prepares the mind for higher exertions. The vexations of the world, on the contrary, become daily more intolerable. In this ill-chosen warfare there is no principle gaining strength that Providence meant to be strengthened. The objects of pursuit become daily of less value ; —the vigour with which they must be pursued is daily wasting. At last, the mind, conscious of having destroyed its own happiness, sinks into hopeless and incurable depression.

This leads me to observe,

III. That the discouraging circumstances in a life of religion are compensated by supports and consolations to which sinners have

have no access. It has already been observed, that the pursuits of the worldly man are not always successful. Let us suppose this to be the case, and that a man of this character, after having fatigued and exhausted himself with the strife of weary passions, finds at last all his plans terminating in vanity and disappointment. What resources are left to a person in such circumstances? The nature of his pursuits must have estranged him from all that could now relieve or comfort him; from cordial devotion,—sincere resignation to God,—and hopeful views of another life.—Bereft of these supports, alas! what has man to lean upon when the world fails and forsakes him?—He is like a wreck on the face of a wide and tumultuous ocean, without the anchor of hope, and far from any haven of repose. His past days are reviewed with shame and remorse;—before him are the dregs of life,—the shadow of death—the terrors of an unknown state. Ah! how desolate and forlorn must the
mind

mind be, when, besides the inevitable burdens of declining life, it has to endure the agonies of guilty recollection, and the forebodings of endless misery.

Consider, on the other hand, the situation of the man who, in the course of a life devoted to the fear of God, is called to bear his part of those sufferings which are allotted to the present state of discipline. He may indeed 'be troubled on every side, 'but not distressed; perplexed, but not in 'despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; 'cast down, but not destroyed.' In all these trying situations, he is supported by the testimony of a good conscience,—by a sense of the divine favour,—and by the hope of heaven.

1st, He is supported by the testimony of a good conscience. This is a reward, indeed, which cannot be exhibited in the same dazzling colours by which worldly advantages entice us. But, let us look inwards, and see what happiness can be enjoyed there when we are at variance with conscience.

conscience. There are no outward evils so intolerable as the horrors of an upbraiding mind. Agitated by these, Belshazzar trembled at the impious feast; and Tiberius confessed in his voluptuous retreat that he daily suffered torments worse than the pangs of a thousand deaths. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?

On the other hand, the approbation of this inward faculty has often inspired the victims of adversity and injustice with a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. Even the discipline of that stern philosophy, which was long the boast and idol of the human mind produced many astonishing examples of patient and cheerful suffering. Unhappily it failed to lay a sufficient foundation for the virtue and magnanimity of its disciples. The gospel of Jesus can alone support this heroism of sentiment and conduct, not by extinguishing the feelings of nature, but by fortifying our minds with that peace of
God

‘God which passeth all understanding.’ The man whose heart is thus established can never be without consolations to cheer him in the darkest hour of distress. He does not, indeed, rest on the testimony of his conscience absolving him from every offence. Sensible that, in many things, he offends, and that in all he comes short of the duty required of him, he deprecates the strict awards of justice, and prostrates himself before the footstool of mercy. But still he can say with humble confidence unto God, ‘I have chosen the way of thy precepts, and I delight in thy law after the inward man. Iniquities, I must confess, have prevailed against me; but, as for my transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.’

2d, Amidst all the sufferings which a life of Religion can involve, the sense of the divine favour is a permanent source of consolation. It is not conceivable that a mind thus supported should ever sink under outward sufferings, or ever dream

dream of renouncing this delightful consciousness for the sake of the highest gratifications which the world can offer. It is a mistake to suppose that, in estimating the comparative happiness of the Religious and the worldly man, we must deduct from that of the former all those pleasures from which his principles lead him to abstain, but which are enjoyed without restraint by the latter. When the heart is once thoroughly attached to Religion, this *abstinence* is no longer *self-denial*. There is even a delight in the most arduous sacrifices of inclination to duty. Review the history of those who have been most eminent examples of a steady regard to Religion. Do we find them always complaining of the hardships in that course of life which they had adopted? Do they express much regret that the road to eternal happiness did not lie through the pleasures of sin? Do we, in short, observe in them that servile and grudging spirit which always marks the conduct of those who undertake a task

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disagreeable

disagreeable to them, either from motives of fear, or from the mere hope of reward?

Was Abraham, the FRIEND OF GOD, of this character? Did he snatch at every worldly advantage that occurred, in order to recompense himself for the sacrifices which Religion required from him? On the contrary, with a noble magnanimity, he disdained to accept the spoils of his conquered foes, refusing to take so much as a shoe-latchet, 'lest they should say that they had 'made Abraham rich.'—Was Moses of this character, who, when he 'was come to 'years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer 'affliction with the people of God, and 'esteeming the reproach of Christ greater 'riches than the treasures of Egypt?'—Was David of this character? 'I have rejoiced '(saith he) in the way of thy testimonies 'more than in all riches. Great peace 'have they that love thy law, and nothing 'shall offend them. A day in thy courts 'is better than a thousand. I had rather 'be

‘be a door-keeper in the house of my
‘God than dwell in the tents of wicked-
‘ness.’

Lastly, amidst all the difficulties and trials which can occur in a life devoted to the fear of God, there is the hope of a BLESSED IMMORTALITY to support and animate the sufferer. ‘Surely there is an
‘end, and his expectation shall not be cut
‘off.’

It is much to say, in favour of a life of Religion, that it at least saves us from the indignity, fatigue, and disappointment, which attend worldly pursuits. It is still more, that, though it does not secure us an exemption from the calamities of this mixed state, it teacheth at least the best philosophy to bear them, the philosophy of submitting our will to that Being who alone knows what is good for us in all the periods of our existence. But when, to these advantages of a Religious life we add the certain issue to which it conducts;—when we consider the peaceful latter end
which

which it ensures ;—when we look beyond this to the rich harvest of happiness in another world which it promises :—Surely the argument may be closed. Surely, having a prospect before us so bright, so certain, we shall no longer envy the enjoyments of the wicked, no longer murmur under the present discipline of Providence, or think the service of God a task without a recompense. .

To conclude : Let us beware of taking up rash prejudices against a life of Religion. Let us not imagine that the ungodly are either always prosperous, or always happy when their prosperity increaseth. ‘ For yet a little while and the wicked shall
‘ not be, yea thou shalt diligently consider
‘ his place and it shall not be. But mark
‘ the perfect man, and behold the upright ;
‘ for the latter end of that man is peace.
‘ Trust thou, therefore, in the Lord, and
‘ do good. Commit thy way to him, and
‘ he shall bring it to pass. Let not thine
‘ heart

'heart envy sinners, but be thou in the
'fear of the Lord all the day long. For
'surely there is an end, and thine expecta-
'tion shall not be cut off.'

SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

ON THE PROSPECTS OF IMMORTALITY
OPENED BY THE GOSPEL.

I PETER, i. 3. 4. 5.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

THE Religion of Nature is not without pretensions to the knowledge and hope of immortality. These pretensions are neither denied nor depreciated by the disciple of the gospel. Conscious of his
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advantages as a Christian, he is not jealous of the claims of reason, nor averse to compare them candidly with the advantages peculiar to revelation. When he is told by those who exalt the light of nature, that the soul of man, being an immaterial substance, cannot be affected by the stroke which dissolves his earthly tabernacle, that the range of its faculties is boundless, that it aspires to immortality, and that the perfections of God, viewed in conjunction with the present plan of Providence, seem to promise the consummation of this desire, he allows that, from these considerations, a probable argument may be derived for a state of being beyond the present. But this concession sinks not, in the smallest degree, the value which he puts on his advantages as a believer in the gospel. He rejoices on being blessed with evidence of this interesting truth, more satisfying and obvious than that which arises from the mere deductions of reason. He finds his doubts more thoroughly dispelled, and his
mind

mind more fully established in the belief of immortality, by resorting to views of a different kind—‘the abundant mercy of God’ in bestowing eternal life as a ‘gift through ‘the Lord Jesus Christ;’—the resurrection of the Saviour as the pledge of this ‘unfading inheritance;’—and the promised guardianship and protection of the divine power ‘to keep him through faith to this ‘salvation ready to be revealed in the last ‘time.’

It will be universally admitted, that the practical influence of Religion, both in fortifying the heart against temptation, and in supporting it under trouble, depends greatly on the clearness of the evidence with which it represents the doctrine of a future state. If that evidence be remote, obscure, or uncertain, a corresponding weakness will attend all the motives of Religion, and supports of virtue. If, on the other hand, it be obvious, satisfying, and lively, an unquestionable advantage will in the same proportion attend its influence on our sentiments

timents and manners. Here is an excellent standard for comparing the supposed advantages of natural religion with that revealed doctrine by which the gospel proposes to regulate and comfort our lives. Let us then institute the comparison on this footing with those who exalt the light of nature, and inquire whether the reasonings of philosophy, or the discoveries of Revealed Religion present the mind with the more lively, assured, and comfortable views, with regard to a future life. In doing this, I will endeavour to state what appear to be the strongest arguments by which the light of nature supports the doctrine of Immortality, and, as I proceed, will point out wherein they are defective, and how they are remedied and rendered complete by the gospel. It shall also be my study to conduct this inquiry with a close reference to the strain of sentiment suggested in the various clauses of the text.

I. Human reason is led to infer the immortality of the soul from the high

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powers

powers and faculties with which it is endowed. When we compare man with the other orders of animated being on earth, the first impression we receive is that of the vast superiority of our own species. Conscious of powers of intelligence, and of capacities of enjoyment far beyond the objects with which we are conversant in the present state of existence, the mind rises above this sublunary sphere, and soars to the thought of an higher destination. Glorious attainments of knowledge, and inef-
fable scenes of happiness, are at times presented to our hopes and wishes. We grasp at them, but, lo! they are not; we put forth our hand, but the fruit of the tree of life recedes from our touch. Thus, empty and disappointed, we ponder with ourselves whether these are only delusive feelings, creating longings that shall never be satisfied. Shall the noble, the aspiring nature of man, be cut off in the very first stages of his existence? Shall all his glowing desires and important expectations perish with
this

this tabernacle of mortal flesh?—Unwilling to yield to this gloomy thought, we flatter ourselves that Immortality shall realize these prospects which glow beyond the colours of nature; and we dwell on the pleasing vision till fancy grows into belief.

If we examine the most admired reasonings of philosophy on the branch of the argument we are now considering, we shall find that they amount to little more than this flattering conjecture. I mean not to assert that such reasonings are destitute of all foundation, or that they are incapable of having any influence on moral conduct. They may faintly present themselves to the mental eye in the hour of lofty contemplation. To a thoughtful and well disposed mind, they may be incitements to heroic, exalted virtue. With a *Socrates*, or a *Cato*, they might outweigh the solicitations of vulgar appetites, and even the natural love of life. But this at least may be asserted, that they are neither so solid nor so obvious, as to be the foundation of what
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the Apostle calls in the text *a lively hope*. To be sensible of this, we have only to divest the argument of the circumstances in it, which are merely pleasing to the imagination, and consider its real weight in establishing the conclusion drawn from it. In this view, it may be asked what certain connection can be pointed out between the honours originally conferred on the human soul, and the privilege of immortal duration? May not the scale of being be varied by the Almighty, from the lowest to the highest orders, without his conferring on any of these varied classes more than a limited term of existence? Can the honours or distinctions, flowing originally from the bounty of God, render any of his works independent of himself, either with regard to being or to happiness? Can they be for a moment supposed to bar the exercise of that Almighty Power, by the energy of which worlds subsist or vanish? Whatever be the dignity of human nature in the view of its most zealous advocates, this at least

least must be allowed, that it cannot be traced beyond that purpose of the Creator. 'Let us make man in our own image * ; and surely the reasoning of the Apostle Paul as to the distinctions between individuals of the human race may, in this argument, be justly applied to the whole species : 'Who maketh thee, O man, to differ' from the meanest classes of animated being ? 'and what hast thou that thou didst not receive ? Now, if thou didst receive it, 'why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it † ?' Let us, however, allow as much to the argument founded on the high honours conferred on human nature as it can possibly claim, viz. that it amounts to a probable token for Immortality. It must surely be admitted, at the same time, that it cannot be the foundation of a lively hope, in this respect, to all men. How few are capable of making so speculative a consideration even an object of their thoughts ?

* Genes. i. 26.

† 1 Corinth. iv. 7.

thoughts? The man of an improved mind alone is conscious of these boasted endowments in any extent; while, on the other hand, they whose condition in life represents to them little else than the humbling necessities of their nature, will hardly, if at all, enter into these towering conceptions of human dignity. Is, then, so great a proportion of mankind to be left destitute of this precious and important prospect, for no other reason than because they are prevented, by inevitable causes, from attaining that degree of intellectual improvement which is necessarily connected with this mode of reasoning? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right in so momentous a concern to all his rational offspring? Is there respect of persons with God? Does he confine his partial favour to the 'wise, 'to the scribe, to the disputer of this world?' Nay, has not the reverse been the plan of his providence, and of his grace? Has he not said, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the 'wise, and bring to nothing the understand-
 'ing

‘ing of the prudent *.’ Did not Jesus, in the days of his flesh, rejoice in spirit on this very account, when he lifted up his eyes and said, ‘I thank thee, O Father, ‘Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast ‘hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes : ‘Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in ‘thy sight †.’ How contrary to the spirit of this thanksgiving, sent up by the Saviour of men, would be the supposition that the doctrine of Immortality had been intended only to be a subject of speculation to the wise and learned, while all the rest of mankind were to be left wandering amidst ignorance and perplexity ?

But we have not yet stated the whole defects of the reasoning under consideration. Admitting all that can be said of the original dignity of human nature, and of the presage of Immortality founded on it ; admitting also, that the reasoning built on

* 1 Corinth. i. 19.

† Luke x. 21.

it were obvious to ordinary minds, still there is a melancholy fact, which subverts every doctrine that can be reared on this foundation. In truth, those original honours of human nature, on which the argument we have been considering is raised, have been forfeited and effaced. Had we preserved this token for Immortality pure and unfulfilled as we received it from our Maker, a *probable*, if not a *lively hope*, might perhaps have been derived from it. But the actual corruption of human nature is so manifest, as to have impressed thinking men, in all ages, with an opinion that some fatal change has passed on it since it came from the hands of the Creator. Even the dreams of Mythology have allowed that the GOLDEN AGE of mankind was quickly succeeded by periods of growing degeneracy. — The Scriptures relieve us from the uncertainty of conjecture on this subject, by informing us that man, by an early act of disobedience, forfeited the innocence and happiness of his primitive state.

state. That noble vine, which at first was wholly a right seed, has turned into the 'degenerate plant of a strange vine,' in the uncultivated wilderness. Those high powers and faculties, which once glowed with the love of excellence and purity, have become instruments of unrighteousness, and been prostituted to every base and corrupt purpose. In surveying human nature, in its present state, we see only the ruins, as it were, of a fabric, once indeed great and stately, but now shattered and prostrate; noxious with a pestilent growth of weeds, loathsome with all manner of uncleanness, so as hardly even to please the eye with any traces of its former grandeur. Such is the present aspect of human nature: These are the lineaments of MAN, who saith of himself—Behold I am noble, and my Maker delighteth in me.

It appears, then, that even the original honours conferred on human nature could not have yielded any assurance of immortality, and that, although they had, yet,

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having

having forfeited them by our apostacy, we have thereby destroyed all the comfortable prospects to be derived from that consideration.

But, while these uncertain and gloomy views perplex, or discourage the scholars of unassisted reason, a clear and joyful light arises to the Christian, who, from the doctrines of the Gospel, derives ‘everlasting consolation, and good hope, through grace*.’ He knows, indeed, that he has forfeited his right, even to the present life, much more to that which is to come. But he rejoices in being ‘begotten again to a lively hope, according to the abundant mercy of God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’ His warrant for entertaining the hope of immortality is the ‘record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son†.’ His expectations are founded, not on his original relation to the ‘first Adam,

* 2 Thes. ii. 13.

† 1 John, v. 11.

‘Adam, who was made a living soul,’ but on the new relation into which he has been brought to ‘the second Adam, who was a ‘quickeneth spirit, and quickeneth whom ‘he will *,’ who said of himself, and proved the truth of what he said by his works. ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He ‘that believeth in me, though he were ‘dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever ‘liveth and believeth in me, shall never ‘die. My sheep hear my voice, and I ‘know them, and they follow me, and I ‘give unto them eternal life. The hour is ‘coming, when the dead shall hear the voice ‘of the Son of man, and they that hear ‘shall live. He that heareth my words, ‘and believeth on him that sent me, hath ‘everlasting life †.’ The believer in the gospel knows indeed that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither corruption inherit incorruption ‡. But he knows also that ‘God hath both raised
‘up

* 1 Corinth. xv. 45.

† John, xi. 25.; x. 27.

‡ 1 Corinth. xv. 50.

' up the Lord, and will raise up us by his
 ' own power* ;' and he looks for the ' Sa-
 ' viour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall
 ' change these vile bodies, and fashion them
 ' like to his glorious body, according to the
 ' working whereby he is able to subdue all
 ' things to himself. So, when this corrup-
 ' tible shall have put on incorruption, and
 ' this mortal shall have put on immortality,
 ' then shall be brought to pass the saying
 ' that is written, Death is swallowed up in
 ' victory. O Death, where is thy sting !
 ' O Grave, where is thy victory ! The sting
 ' of death is sin, and the strength of sin is
 ' the law. But thanks be to God who giveth
 ' us the victory, through our Lord Jesus
 ' Christ †.' For, now we no longer merely
suppose or conjecture, but we ' KNOW that, if
 ' our earthly house of this tabernacle were
 ' dissolved, we have a building of God, an
 ' house not made with hands, eternal in the
 ' heavens ‡.'

Thus

* 1 Corinth. vi. 14.

† Ibid. xv. 54.

‡ 2 Corinth. v. 1

Thus we have seen what important advantages the gospel has in this respect, and how much the evidence which it affords excels the arguments from which the light of nature infers the immortality of the human soul. These arguments amount, at best, only to a probability; they are not obvious to the understandings of all men; and, in the present guilty and depressed state of human nature, they seem to warrant no comfortable conclusion. The discoveries of the gospel, on the other hand, are clear, explicit, and propitious. They not only declare that man is formed for immortality, but also assure us, in the most express terms, that man shall live for ever. They proclaim 'the promise which God, 'that cannot lie, hath promised unto us, even eternal life *.' This promise they proclaim in a language intelligible and obvious to all men, and comfortable even to those who labour under the sense of guilt,
by

* Titus, i. 2.

by declaring that, 'being justified by his
 ' grace, they may be made heirs, according
 ' to the hope of eternal life *.'—'Blessed,'
 therefore, 'be the God and Father of our
 ' Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his
 ' abundant mercy, hath begotten us again
 ' unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of
 ' Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheri-
 ' tance incorruptible and undefiled, and that
 ' fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for
 ' you who are kept, by the power of God,
 ' through faith, unto salvation, ready to be
 ' revealed in the last time.'

* Titus, iii. 7.

SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

P A R T S E C O N D.

ON THE PROSPECTS OF IMMORTALITY
OPENED BY THE GOSPEL.

1 PETER, i. 3. 4. 5.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

IT was proposed to state what appear to be the strongest arguments by which the light of nature supports the doctrine of Immortality, to point out wherein they are defective,

defective, and to shew how they are remedied, and rendered complete by the gospel. The argument which arises from the high powers of intelligence, and capacities of enjoyment, bestowed on the human soul, has been already considered, and, after allowing it all the weight that can possibly be ascribed to it, we found that it amounted at best only to a probability, that it was too refined for the comprehension of the greater part of mankind, and that, in the present state of human nature, the prospect arising from it was intercepted by the consciousness of guilt and depravity. We have seen, on the other hand, that none of these defects attend the evidence by which the gospel establishes the doctrine of a future life. Clear and propitious, it is at once intelligible to all men, and comfortable even to those who labour under the sense of guilt, by declaring, that, being justified by grace, they may be made 'heirs according to the hope of eternal life.'

I proceed now to observe,

II. That an argument for a state of being beyond the present life may be derived, by our reasoning faculties, from the consideration of God's moral government of the world.

That beings endowed, as we are, with freedom of action, controlled only by moral perception and feeling, must be finally accountable for their conduct, is a conclusion which presents itself with irresistible evidence to every thinking mind. It is, however, certain that no strict account of human conduct is taken in the present life. The arrangements of Providence with regard to the various conditions of men, instead of impressing us with the idea of a just and exact retribution, have in many cases the very contrary aspect. If the wicked are not oftener in prosperity than the righteous, it is at least evident that 'all things happen alike to all, 'that no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them *;' in other

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words,

* Eccles. ix. 1. 2.

words, that the moral distinctions of character do not determine the outward differences in the lot of men. The groans of the innocent, and the triumphant shouts of the oppressor, are heard together, and proclaim, on all hands, that the disorders of the present state require a day of compensation. Cast your eyes abroad through the world, and say whether you can preserve any respectful ideas of the divine justice, without resorting to the thought of a judgment to come. On the one hand, you see the peaceable, modest, and worthy mind, struggling with a load of evils, oppressed with poverty, overwhelmed with contempt, and precluded, by its very virtues, from that relief which the clamorous and violent often obtain. You trace the lot of these children of affliction through an unbroken series of griefs. No cheering beam breaks through their gloomy day. The cloud that overcast their morning blackens even till it meets the shades of night. ' They die
' in

‘in the bitterness of their soul, and never
‘eat bread in peace *.’

On the other hand, you see the sons of pride and violence sitting in the chair of the scorner, or brandishing the rod of oppression. No sorrows interrupt their festivity. They are ‘clothed in purple and
‘fine linen, and fare sumptuously every
‘day.’—‘They are not in trouble as other
‘men; neither are they plagued like other
‘men. Pride compasseth them about as a
‘chain; violence covereth them as a gar-
‘ment. Their eyes stand out with fatness;
‘they have more than their hearts could
‘wish. Even their latter end is easy;
‘they go down to the grave in a moment,
‘and have no bands in their death *.’—Is
this the last and closing scene of both?
Shall the unequal account stand thus for ever?
Shall the oppressed and his oppressor
lie down together, and sleep with equal
calmness an everlasting sleep? Wherefore,
then,

* Job, xxi. 25.

† Psalms, lxxiii. 5. 6. 7.

then, has the Author of our being implanted in our breasts the strong feelings of compassion, in the one case, of resentment and abhorrence, in the other? Wherefore doth he excite the ardent longing for the redress of virtuous sufferings, and the stern vindictive joy when the wicked are cast down? Are not these tokens and presages of a period which shall rectify and compensate the present inequalities of Providence,—when ‘every crooked thing shall be made straight before the Lord,’ when order shall be brought out of confusion, and the ways of God be justified before the assembled universe?

Such is the state of this branch of the argument by which the light of nature supports the doctrine of a life to come; an argument, it must be allowed, far more solid and obvious than that which is derived from speculations with regard to the nature of the soul itself. It is the consciousness of our being accountable creatures that chiefly conveys to us the persuasion, that we shall

shall be continued in being after our connection with this world is dissolved.

If it now be asked, What is the defect in this part of the doctrine of reason?—the answer is, That it is not so defective in evidence to prove the truth of a future state, as in COMFORT to reconcile our minds to the view of it. We are considering the doctrine of immortality as suited to the *actual*, not to an *imaginary*, state of human nature. The question, therefore, is, whether the prospect of rendering an account of the deeds done in the body at a bar of strict justice be a thought which affords consolation to the mind of man in its present guilty condition?—Under the sense of human wrongs, while anger and vexation swallow up every other feeling, the idea, even of this late redress, may indeed sometimes gratify the mind of the sufferer. A hasty, uncharitable consolation may, in such circumstances, be derived from the view of that period when the oppressor shall have all his injuries returned on his own head.

head. But, let us look into ourselves, and see whether this prospect, considered in all its circumstances, be such, that we can direct our eyes to it with *lively hope*. Is there nothing to appal the mind in the thought of standing before the tribunal of the Judge of all the earth? Are we fully prepared to endure the scrutiny of Omniscience:—Does no desire of clemency mingle itself with that prospect of retribution which we entertain?

Let us consider seriously how the case stands. The hopes of nature, with respect to the issue of the general judgment, are certainly not founded on the perfection of our own innocence and virtue. If there be any who do found them on this basis, they must indeed be addressed with a different kind of reasoning: And surely it would be no difficult task to confute their pretensions. But, in fact, there are few, if there be any at all, who lay claim to that spotless innocence and virtue which will abide the test of impartial justice. The bulk
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of mankind found their confidence on other grounds, equally false, indeed, but not so glaring in their absurdity. They rely on the general clemency of the Divine Nature, and, on this vague conception, presume that, though they are sinners, they shall pass unpunished. But what sound reasoning can be produced to warrant such an expectation? The most favourable conclusion on this head, at which nature can arrive, is, that the goodness of God, and the infirmity of man considered, our feeble endeavours to serve him may perhaps be accepted, though mingled with many infirmities and defects. Now, it is evident that the consolation to be derived from this supposition applies only to the case of those who, amidst many errors and omissions, are, in the general strain of their character, sincere and upright. Even to them, it is no more than a *supposition*, altogether incapable of establishing their minds with any *lively hope*. For, what if the moral government of God should forbid

bid any relaxation of the sanctions by which his law is guarded? Nay, what if iniquity should be but left to its own natural tendency to produce misery?—Such apprehensions must at times shake the minds of the most sincere and upright; much more must they overwhelm, and utterly destroy, the hopes of the presumptuous offender. To him the issues of God's moral government can present no other prospect than a 'certain fearful looking for of wrath and fiery indignation, which shall consume the adversaries *.'—So defective, in point of comfort, is the soundest argument by which unassisted reason infers the doctrine of another life.—While the obvious necessity of a future retribution, in order to compensate the present inequalities in the dispensations of Providence, inspires the belief of an after state; the justice with which that retribution shall be conducted alarms, with inexpressible terrors, the mind that

* Hebrews, x. 27.

that knows no refuge from the wrath of the offended Judge.

It is not so with the believer in the gospel, who has learned, from the doctrines of revelation, to derive comfort even from the most awful perfections of the Divine Nature. His hopes are not the vague suggestions of a mind eager to catch at every delusive comfort. They are confirmed by a solemn covenant, ratified by the oath of him who cannot lie; they are founded on the atoning death and glorious resurrection of his Saviour. He knows that God is just, as well as merciful, 'when he justifieth him who believeth in Jesus *.' On the one hand, indeed, he sees the awful decrees of justice ready to be executed on a guilty apostate race. But, on the other hand, he sees sovereign mercy rejoicing in a sufficient atonement, and preventing the awful doom from descending, by these gracious words: 'Deliver them from going
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* Rom. iii. 26.

‘down to the pit, I have found a ransom *.’ Nature, in her hopes, is constrained to avert her eyes from the holiness and purity of God, as perfections unfriendly to the welfare of her children. But the Christian sees all the attributes of Deity magnified and harmoniously displayed in that dispensation of grace, by which ‘help is laid for him on one mighty to save.’ Thus knowing in whom he has believed, he can adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle Paul,—‘Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us †.’

III. Granting that the light of nature could infer the certainty of a life to come, and that it could derive comfort from the prospect of it, still much obscurity would hang

* Job, xxxiii. 24.

† Rom. viii. 33. 34.

hang on all the ideas which it could form of such a state of being. On its own principles it could suppose only one part of our compound frame to survive the stroke of death. The fact accordingly is, that, among all the speculations of philosophers on this subject, it was never once imagined that the corporeal part of our nature could partake with the soul in immortality. They were not only destitute of this idea, but the very contrary idea was the basis of any belief they had in a future state. When they taught that the soul was immortal, they added as the reason of its being so, that it was immaterial, that it was only embarrassed with the presence of the body, and that it would not arrive at its proper vigour and enjoyment until it should be set free from this fleshly prison. But these notions were far from being accommodated to the ordinary conceptions of mankind. How that sameness of the individual, which seems so essential to the justice of a future retribution, could be preserved, when the organs
of

of action should be for ever destroyed, was not easily explained by philosophers themselves, and still less readily apprehended by the vulgar. In this point, therefore, as well as in those already mentioned, the light of nature seems to have been defective, and unable to support the doctrine of immortality with sufficient evidence. But the difficulty, so stumbling to reason, is fully removed by the gospel. The Christian is taught to expect the reunion of soul and body in the day of the Lord. He is 'begotten again to this lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' This is to him the pledge of life and immortality. 'For now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept *.'—'By man came death, and by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive †.'—'I know that my Redeemer liveth,

* 1 Corinth. xv. 23.

† Ibid. xv. 23.

‘veth, and that he shall stand at the latter
‘day upon the earth; and though, after
‘my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in
‘my flesh shall I see God *.’

IV. All the comfortable expectations
which can be entertained of our condition
in a future state, must necessarily depend
on the prospect of our being able to con-
tinue stedfast in virtue to the last period
of life. The doctrine of reason, as well
as that of the gospel, teacheth us that
it is only to them ‘who, by a patient
‘continuance in well doing, seek for glo-
‘ry, honour, and immortality, that God
‘will render eternal life †.’ But, how
shall creatures, weak and erring as we are,
propose to maintain this persevering in-
tegrity? Nature informs us of no resour-
ces but those within our own minds. But
alas! when we look inwards to discover
these, what do we see?—a feeble disorder-
ed frame in which the influence of evil
habits and affections have acquired a fatal
ascendency

* Job, xix. 25.

† Romans, ii. 7.

ascendency over the powers of reason and conscience. If we look abroad on our situation, the prospect is not less alarming : A world full of temptations, where danger lurks under every condition of life. If we call for the testimony of past experience, how many broken vows, how many deceitful resolutions, reproach us with inconstancy? * To will may be present with us, * but how to perform that which is good we * find not. The good that we would, we * do not ; the evil which we would not, that * we do: We may even delight in the law * of God after the inward man ; but still * we feel another law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and * bringing us into captivity to the law of * sin, which is in our members *.—‘ Iniquities prevail against us, and our goodness has been as the morning cloud, and the early dew, that soon passeth away.’

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The Christian is not without the same disadvantages with respect to his own powers, his outward condition, and the testimony concerning his past conduct. None of these supply him with any comfort. But it is his comfort to 'know in whom he has believed, and that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him, even to the great and decisive day *.' It is his comfort to listen to that assurance of his Redeemer. 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of his hand. I and my Father are one †.' No danger to which they are exposed, whether from without or from within, is unknown to this powerful Shepherd of Israel, this faithful friend and guardian of his people. Once
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* 2 Timothy, i. 12.

† John x. 27, — 29.

the surety for their sins, he is now their Advocate at the right hand of God, and pursues with the same zeal as ever the plan for their eternal welfare. Where he has begun a good work, he will carry it on until he has presented every one that has been given him of the Father faultless in his presence with exceeding joy.—This is the crowning circumstance in the prospects of Immortality opened by the Gospel. The Christian is not only ‘begotten again to a ‘lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible; ‘undefiled, and that fadeth not away;’ this inheritance is not only laid up for him in a sure place, but he is preserved for it ‘by the ‘power of God thro’ faith unto salvation.’ The title to his inheritance is in better custody than his own. He who at first bestowed, guards it in the archives of eternity; and, while the allurements of this strange country tempt him to forget or to forfeit his birthright, this wise and powerful Guardian surrounds him with everlasting arms, keeps him from the evil that is in the world,

world, trains him to a meetness for the inheritance of saints in light, and seals him to the day of redemption. 'Blessed,' therefore, 'be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fa-
'deth not away, reserved in heaven for
'you, who are kept by the power of God,
'through faith unto salvation, ready to be
'revealed in the last time.'

Thus have I endeavoured to make the comparison between natural and revealed religion, as to the prospects they respectively afford of a future state: equally solicitous to detract from the former no advantage that belongs to it, and to ascribe to the latter none which it may not justly claim. —Let me now ask which of the teachers ye prefer? Is there more happiness in doubt and conjecture than in certainty? Is it better to rely on obscure and vanishing

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speculations than on the promise of God, who cannot lie? Are they more blessed who can only say, 'Peradventure the Lord will not punish,' than those who can rejoice in him as the God of their salvation, and put their confidence in his *sure mercies*? Is the soul more delighted with the thought of a separate existence, than with the prospect of reunion with those organs by which it has hitherto perceived and enjoyed? Is the entire dependence on ourselves preferable to the assistance and guardianship of Almighty Power?—Then are they wise who disdain the gospel? Then are they the friends of mankind who reproach and ridicule it. But, let it also be remembered, that, unless these suppositions be true, unpardonable folly on their own part, and inhuman cruelty to their fellow-creatures, must characterise those who, amid this clear and joyful light that has come into the world, prefer their own shadowy conjectures, and labour to reduce others to the same dubious and uncomfortable

able situation.—But I cannot close the subject without an expostulation of a different kind.—We have seen the superior advantages which, as Christians, we enjoy above the disciples of Nature. We have seen the clearer evidences of immortality, the stronger supports of virtue, with which we are blessed. What influence ought these considerations to have on our conduct? Distinguished by the enjoyment of so many advantages, shall we not study to live as becomes the heirs of the grace of life, and to walk worthy of God who has called us to his kingdom and glory? There is little difficulty in displaying the superiority of the prospects which the gospel has opened, compared with those which the light of Nature affords to its disciples.—Would to God it were equally easy to shew the greater practical influence they have on our conduct! But alas! this is not so obvious. We can speak glorious things, of the truths we profess to believe, but very little of their actual corresponding effects on our practice.

tiee.—Let us study to remove this unhappy
 reproach. Let us ‘commend ourselves to
 ‘the consciences of men,’ as candidates for
 immortality, by living superior to the a-
 lurements, and terrors, and little competi-
 tions of the present world. Let us shew
 that the superior hopes which we entertain
 have in *fact* all the influence we ascribe to
 them, by ‘denying ungodliness and worldly
 ‘lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and
 ‘godly, in the world, looking for that
 ‘blessed hope, and the glorious appearance
 ‘of the great God and our Saviour Jesus
 ‘Christ,’ who gave himself for us, that he
 ‘might redeem us from all iniquity, and
 ‘purify unto himself a peculiar people,
 ‘zealous of good works.’

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

ON THE COMPASSIONATE DESIGN OF OUR SAVIOUR'S INCARNATION.

LUKE xix. 10.

*For the Son of Man is come to seek and to
save that which was lost.*

WE learn from the preceding verses,
that our Lord, in passing through
Jericho, towards Jerusalem, shewed an un-
expected mark of distinction to a man of
the name of Zaccheus. This man was not
only of the obnoxious profession of a pub-
lican, but also, by his own acknowledg-
ment, and the account of those who knew
him,

him, an open and scandalous sinner. Our Saviour's conduct, in this instance, gave offence to the bystanders. They murmured at seeing his favour so unworthily bestowed in offering himself as a guest in the house of a man of abandoned character. But Jesus, who never deviated from the path of benevolence, either to gain the applause, or to avoid the censure of the multitude, persisted in his gracious purpose ; and having inspired Zaccheus with that faith and repentance to which he had called him, publicly declared, in the hearing of them all, that he whom they reviled as the chief of sinners, was now become an heir of the grace of life. ' This day,' said he, ' is salvation come to this house,' adding, in the words of the text, '*For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*'—' To befriend the miserable and the guilty is my very errand into the world ; and the present act of condescension which you condemn, is no more than a conspicuous illustration of this important truth ;

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'I have chosen this man, notoriously unworthy as he is, to proclaim to the chief of sinners that the door of mercy is open, and that I am able and willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto God, trusting in my mediation. Your dissatisfaction, therefore, proceeds from mistaken views of my character.'—*'For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.'*

The illustration of these words will naturally lead me,

1st, To take a view of the wretched condition of mankind, in consequence of their apostacy from God;

2dly, To represent the generous compassion of our Redeemer, in undertaking to deliver us from this unhappy state;

3dly, To shew you that he is fully able to accomplish what he has thus graciously undertaken.

I begin with taking a view of the wretched condition of mankind in consequence of their apostacy from God. The expression in the text, it may be observed, is
of

of the strongest import. Language does not afford a more emphatical description of complete wretchedness applied to any individual, than to say that he is *lost*. This melancholy description is here applied to the whole human race; and it evidently suggests, in the

1st Place, that man has gone astray from the path of life and happiness. Independently of what we are taught in revelation, human nature in itself bears evident marks of degeneracy and corruption. The passions which enslave our minds, the diseases that afflict our bodies, the disorders in the natural and moral world around us, the various wretchedness of man, and the universal law of mortality, all proclaim that some unhappy change has passed on our nature since its original formation. Hence the conjectures of some ancient philosophers concerning a state of pre-existence, in which human souls had contracted guilt that must be expiated in the course of successive transmigrations into other bodies.

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It is Revelation alone which solves this appearance so difficult to be accounted for by Reason. There we are taught that man has debased himself below the rank originally assigned him among the works of God ; that an early act of disobedience forfeited the honours of his primitive condition ; and that the sin of our first parents adheres to all their offspring, in the evils which arise from a corrupt and diseased nature. In the emphatical language of Scripture, we have committed two great evils : ' We have forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed out for ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water *.' Our steps are turned away from the only path of happiness. Our heavenly Father is not in all our thoughts ; or, if a reflection on his being and attributes ever pass through our minds, it serves only to beget dread and aversion. The language of our ungrateful and corrupted hearts is, ' Depart
B b ' from

* Jerem. ii. 13.

‘from us, for we desire not the knowledge
 ‘of thy ways *.’—Nor let it be thought
 that this description applies only to the
 grossly profligate and abandoned part of
 mankind. Some, it must be confessed, are
 less depraved in their outward manners
 than others. Our practice, and even our
 tempers, may receive a considerable im-
 provement from human culture and edu-
 cation. Still, however, there is, in every
 mere natural man, however civilized and
 decent in his external conduct, a stubborn
 principle of rebellion against God, which
 nothing less than omnipotent grace can
 subdue. In the
 2d place, Man has not only gone astray
 from the path of life, but may be also said
 to be *lost* in a still more awful sense, ha-
 ving exposed himself to the fatal effects of
 his Maker’s displeasure. ‘And who know-
 ‘eth the power of God’s anger †?’ Who
 can imagine or describe the judgments
 which

* Job, xxi. 14.

† Psalms, cx. 11.

which he has in store against the enemies of his government? 'When thou with rebukes (saith the Psalmist) dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth *.' If such be the effect even of his fatherly chastisements, how dreadful must his fiery indignation be! 'It is a fearful thing to fall in to the hands of the living God.' There is not a part of these fleshly tabernacles which he cannot visit with torments insufferable; and, if but a spark of his wrath fall upon the soul,—ah! how exquisite is the anguish! The unhappy creature is already on the confines of hell; every moment summoned, in his imagination, to judgment, and as often sent back condemned; by night scared with frightful visions, and all day long tortured by an evil conscience; so that his 'soul chooseth strangeling,' and nothing but his dread of the unknown state hereafter prevents him from shortening

* Psalms, xxxix. 11.

shortening his lothed existence on earth, Yet, even this is but a foretaste of that unspeakably greater misery which awaits the impenitent in a future state ; when the wrath of God shall not distil in drops, but descend in a mighty sweeping deluge ; when incensed Omnipotence shall rain upon the wicked ‘ snares, fire, and brimstone, as the ‘ portion of their cup.’—These are the bitter fruits of our apostacy from God. And, to complete this account of the wretchedness of our condition, it is to be observed,

3dly, That we are utterly unable to deliver ourselves by any efforts of our own. The redemption of the soul is so precious, that it must have failed for ever, had it been left to our own power to accomplish. No sacrifice that we could have provided would have been sufficient to expiate our past offences ; nor could any vigilance or exertion of our own powers have prevented the accumulation of fresh guilt. Our natures are wholly depraved and corrupted ; we have lost both our ‘ righteousness
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'and our strength; and in us, that is, in our 'flesh,' or unrenewed nature, 'dwelleth no 'good thing.' It is unnecessary to produce particular passages of Scripture to confirm this account of human nature in its present condition. It appears on the whole face of revelation; the plan of our redemption by Jesus Christ supposes the truth of it; And, whoever knows it not, is ignorant of the first elements of the gospel. Such is the wretched condition of fallen man.—He has gone astray from the path of life and happiness, exposed himself to the vengeance of the Almighty, and is destitute equally of ability, and of inclination, to do any thing for his own relief.

These, I confess, are unpleasant tidings; so unpleasant, that it is not conceivable that any person should wish to publish them for their own sake. Nay, were no message of comfort to follow, a strong temptation would arise to imitate the conduct of the prophet Jonah, when he declined to go and denounce the threatenings of the Almighty
against

against Nineveh. But, blessed be God, this is not the case. Help is laid for us on one mighty to save; and the unfavourable description that has been given of our natural condition has been only designed to prepare you for the glad tidings which I am now to proclaim; while I proceed, as was proposed,

II. To represent the generous compassion of our Redeemer, in undertaking to deliver us from this unhappy state.

We read, in the 4th chapter of this gospel, that, after our Lord had declared his commission at Nazareth, by applying to himself that remarkable passage in the Prophecy of *Isaiah* *, ‘The spirit of the Lord
‘God is upon me, because the Lord hath
‘anointed me to preach good tidings unto
‘the meek; he hath sent me to bind up
‘the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to
‘the captives, and the opening of the pri-
‘son to them that are bound;’ we read, I
say,

* *Isaiah*, lxi. 1.

say, that, after Christ had applied this prophetic description to himself, 'they all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth *.' The words of the text are surely worthy of our highest admiration on the same account. Not only is the import of them most gracious, but the expressions themselves are also the most tender and affecting that could possibly have been devised. How condescending is the appellation he assumes! 'THE SON OF MAN.' Throwing a veil over the dazzling glories of Divinity; he manifests himself to men in the mild and amiable character of their kinsman and friend; and, though conscious of being equal with the Father, he yet delights in representing himself as a partaker of that inferior nature, by which he was rendered capable of suffering for man. 'The SON OF MAN is come,'—come from heaven to earth, from infinite affluence and glory, to the

* Luke iv. 22.

the lowest poverty and disgrace ; from the bosom of the Father, to the wretched and guilty abode of mortals. ' The SON OF ' MAN is come to seek them which were ' lost,' not to drag them to the judgment-seat, and inflict the punishment which their crimes deserved, but to seek that he may SAVE them which were lost ; not merely to proclaim offers of mercy, but to pursue, with tender exhortation and intreaty, those who are flying from their own happiness ; and never to desist from the pursuit until he instate as many as will accept of his good offices in a happiness far more exalted than that which they had forfeited.

' The Son of Man is come to seek and to ' save that which was lost.'

But, it may be asked, upon what authority do we receive this gracious declaration, conveyed in these terms so tender and affecting ? They are the words, indeed, of our Lord himself, who is ' the faithful and ' true witness ;' but the evidence of their truth

truth does not rest merely on his own assertion.

If we look back to the writings of the Old Testament, we shall find this doctrine published in Paradise, immediately after the apostacy of our first parents. Then was the gracious promise issued, 'That the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head* ;' a plain intimation that a Saviour, in the human nature, should appear to defeat the malice of the great adversary, and prevent the total ruin of mankind. In the subsequent ages of the world, this early promise was gradually illustrated by types and sacrifices, and prophecies, which, although grossly misunderstood by the Jews, through their worldly prejudices, had yet produced a general expectation of a deliverer at the time when Jesus actually appeared. Accordingly, when the fulness of time was come, our blessed Lord made his entrance into the world in the declared

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character

* Genesis, iii. 15.

character of a Redeemer. His office was, by the divine appointment, signified by his very name : ‘ Thou shalt call his name Jesus,’ said the Angel to Joseph, ‘ for he shall save his people from their sins *.’ His birth was celebrated by a proclamation of peace between heaven and earth : A multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ‘ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to-wards men †.’ The aged Simeon welcomed him into the temple, as the Salvation of God ‡; while the Prophetess Anna gave public thanks on his account, and ‘ spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem §.’ At his baptism the heavens were opened ; the Holy Ghost descended on him in the form of a dove ; and an audible voice, from the Excellent Majesty, proclaimed these words : ‘ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

* Matth. i. 21. † Luke, ii. 13. 14. ‡ Ibid. ii. 30.
§ Luke, ii. 38.

'Ied * ;' a testimony which was afterwards repeated on the mount of Transfiguration, with this command annexed to it, 'Hear ye him †.' But the most satisfying evidence of the point now under consideration arises from taking a view of him in the public exercise of his office. How great was his condescension to the chief of sinners ? How earnestly did he intreat them to come unto him, that they might have life ? Behold him weeping over the impending fate of Jerusalem ! or rather, behold him bleeding on the cross, and, with the last breath of life, pouring out this prayer for his murtherers, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do ‡.' Carry forward your views, and behold him at the right hand of the Majesty on high, continuing, as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance, and the remission of sins ; presenting before his Father
that

* Matthew, ili. 17.

† Ibid. xvii. 5.

‡ Luke, xxiii. 34.

that body which was broken on the accursed tree, urging the remembrance of his painful and ignominious death as grounds of intercession on behalf of his people. Behold him, in fine, perpetuating his gracious embassy to the human race, by appointing an order of men to beseech them, as fellow workers with God, not to receive his grace in vain. Lay all these considerations together, and say, whether you could desire any farther evidence that *'the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.'* It now only remains for me to show you,

III. That he is fully able to accomplish what he has thus graciously undertaken. Consider, then, in the

1st place, That he was actually chosen and set apart by the Father for this very work. Look back to that mysterious and august transaction in the Counsels of Eternity, when he who afterwards appeared as the Son of Man, undertook the generous task, in this address to the *'Ancient of Days,*

‘ Days,’ — ‘ Sacrifice and offering thou
‘ wouldst not ; but a body hast thou pre-
‘ pared for me. In burnt offerings and
‘ sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.
‘ Then said I, Lo ! I come (in the volume
‘ of thy book it is written of me), to do
‘ thy will, O God *. — ‘ Christ glorified not
‘ himself to be made an High Priest ; but
‘ he who said unto him, thou art my Son,
‘ this day have I begotten thee †.’ Hence
he is called ‘ the servant and the elect of
‘ God, in whom his soul delighteth ‡ ;’ —
‘ a man approved of God by miracles, and
‘ wonders, and signs ||.’

And is it possible to imagine that infinite
Wisdom should make choice of a weak in-
effectual instrument, or appoint to so im-
portant an office one unqualified to perform
it ? This consideration, were there even
no other, might be sufficient to convince
us of his saving power, and to demonstrate
that

* Hebrews, i. 5.—7.

† Ibid. v. 5.

‡ Isaiah, xlii. 1.

|| Acts, ii. 22.

that the undertaking, however great and difficult, does not exceed his ability. But the evidence on this head will appear still more convincing, if we consider,

2dly, The qualifications by which he is fitted for this undertaking. The anxiety of a guilty mind may be ready to raise up to itself such objections as these: 'I confess that the ground of hope from the divine appointment of the Saviour seems strong and satisfying. I dare not ascribe an error to God in the choice of the instrument by which he purposes to execute his will. But still my mind cannot find a sufficient rest in this. His justice is engaged for the punishment of sin, and how can sin be punished without misery to the offender? Among all the creatures of God, I hear of none that can shelter me from this decreed penalty. Sin has been as fatal to angels as to men. Such of them as left their first estate have never been able to expiate their own guilt. They are reserved in everlasting chains, under

“ under darkness, to the judgment of the
“ great day.” Who, then, can be supposed
‘ able to interpose effectually for transgres-
‘ sors of the human race, since creatures so
‘ much superior to them have been made
‘ examples to the universe of inexorable
‘ justice?’ But all these objections of the
jealous misgiving mind vanish, when we
consider the union of the divine and hu-
man natures in the person of our Saviour.
He is GOD as well as MAN; EMANUEL
GOD in our nature. ‘ The word was made
‘ flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld
‘ his glory, the glory as of the only begotten
‘ of the Father), full of grace and truth *.’
In this view, the most anxious mind may
be challenged to point out a defect in the
comforts of the gospel. Let us set our-
selves to devise those qualifications of a Re-
deemer which would be sufficient to re-
move every degree of jealousy and appre-
hension, and we shall find them all united

in

* John, i. 14.

in the person of Jesus. Must he have the qualities which tend to procure our confidence in his ability to save? What higher requisition could we make, than that the fulness of Almighty Power should be his? Behold in Jesus 'the great God and your 'Saviour *.' By him the worlds were made, and unto him all power in heaven and on earth is committed. Must he have that near and intimate relation to ourselves which may lead us to rely on his cordial regard to our interest? What more could we ask, than that he should be bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, a partaker of our infirmities, and a fellow sufferer of our sorrows? Behold in Jesus the SON OF MAN 'made in all things like unto his 'brethren.' Let all the fears of the penitent, therefore, vanish before this mystery of godliness, 'God manifested in the flesh.' The MAN who suffered and died in that nature which had offended, not only possessed an original dignity, which conferred an
infinite

* Titus, ii. 13.

infinite value on his sufferings as an expiation, but, for the suffering of death, is now crowned with glory, and intrusted with universal dominion. He ever lives to make intercession for us. Glorious and exalted as he is, the interests of his people are still dear to him. He is still the same 'merciful and faithful High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmity, and ready to succour them who are tempted.' Let it be added, in the

Last place, That he has not only actually done all that we can conceive to be necessary for obtaining and securing our eternal happiness, but that God has openly declared his perfect satisfaction with the whole of his conduct as mediator, by exalting him to his own right hand; of which important fact we are repeatedly assured in the Scriptures of truth *. This is the most authentic testimony of the divine acceptance that could possibly be given. The undertaking

D d

was

* Ephes. i. 21. 22. ; Philipp. iii. 8.

was surely acceptable, and the performance satisfying, which obtained so conspicuous a reward. The debt was undoubtedly paid when the surety was set free; and the payment was certainly adequate and ample, when the surety, besides being released, was exalted; exalted, not only to perform the remaining part of his office, by interceding for those in whose behalf the sacrifice was offered, but raised to a kingly power, to bestow the benefits purchased by his blood, and to carry on, by his spirit, the work of salvation in the hearts of men.

Thus have I endeavoured to illustrate the declaration in the text. I. By taking a view of the wretched condition of human nature, in consequence of our apostacy from God. II. By representing the generous compassion of our Redeemer, in undertaking to deliver us from this unhappy state. III. By shewing that he is fully able to accomplish what he has thus generously undertaken.

On

On the review of what has been said, do not our hearts adopt the solemn expostulation of the Apostle to the Hebrews ? 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation * ?' Be assured, O impenitent sinner ! thou art bringing on thyself vengeance and condemnation more awful than even that which apostate angels suffer in the regions of everlasting darkness. They never had the offer which thou madly refusedst ; and therefore their guilt is in so far less than thine. There are many awful expressions in Scripture ; but that which sounds in my ears the deepest tone of alarm is the WRATH of the LAMB ! For, O what must that indignation be, which can transform the countenance of the meek and gentle Saviour into frowns more dreadful than the falling of rocks and mountains, and the ruin of an expiring world ! Yet this shall be the portion of all those who despise the grace of the gospel. At present,

* Hebrews, ii. 3.

present, you may be able to put away the thought of the doom that awaits you ; but you cannot arrest the course of time ; you can neither bribe nor resist the King of terrors. O then be persuaded to relinquish the vain resource of putting the evil day a-far off ! The gracious invitations of the gospel still sound in your ears. ‘ To day, ‘ if ye will hear his voice, harden not your ‘ hearts *.’—‘ We, as ambassadors for ‘ Christ, as though God did beseech you ‘ by us, pray you, in Christ’s stead, that ye ‘ be reconciled to God †.’ Now you may obtain an interest in the friendship of the ‘ Son of Man, who came to seek and to ‘ save that which was lost ;’ and if, like Zaccheus, who gave occasion to the words of the text, you make haste and receive him joyfully, as sure as God liveth your souls shall be safe. Thus far I can go, but not one step farther. I read of Felix promising to give Paul an after hearing ; but I do

* Hebrews, iii. 7. 8.

† 2 Corinth. v. 20.

do not read that he kept his word.—
‘See, here is water,’ said the Eunuch to Philip, ‘What doth hinder me to be baptised?’—I now say to you, Lo! here is the Son of Man demanding entrance into your hearts, offering to be your guest, and to bring salvation along with him. What doth hinder you from instantly opening and receiving him?—‘Now is the accepted time;—Now is the day of Salvation.’ But I cannot bid you trust to any future period; I dare not assure you of an opportunity beyond the present. Before another day succeed, your doom may be irrevocably fixed.
Let the trembling convinced sinner take encouragement from the subject we have been considering. As the enemy of souls usually flatters the presumptuous with groundless hopes of safety, so he endeavours to torment the penitent with unnecessary fears and jealousies. To them he represents

represents the greatness of their guilt, and the power of their evil habits, as reasons to despair of salvation. But all such objections are fully answered, by considering that the Son of Man is as *able* as he is *willing* 'to seek and to save them that were lost.' As the merit of his atonement exceeds, by infinite degrees, the guilt of your offences, so doth the power of his grace surpass the strength of your corruption. He who made your heart, can surely renew it. Commit yourselves to him as the great Physician: He will purify your souls by his spirit, and adorn them with his image. You have no disease which he cannot heal, no burden which he cannot sustain, or remove. If you truly abhor your sins, and long to be delivered from them, both as to their guilt and their dominion, you are the persons to whom he offers his saving help; he will receive you graciously, and make his strength perfect in your weakness.

But

But the full comfort which this subject affords belongs to those who, having thrown down the weapons of their rebellion, have cordially accepted the Saviour in all his offices. Hail ye blessed among the sons of men ! Great are the blessings and privileges of which ye are already possessed. Your guilt is pardoned ; the tyranny of sin is broken ; death is disarmed of his sting ; and your souls are rescued from the adversary. That Justice which was formerly your enemy has become your friend ; and truth joins with mercy in pleading your cause. But lo ! greater things than these are before you. The day of your complete redemption draweth nigh. Yet a little while, and your pardon shall be ratified by a solemn acquittal before an assembled world ; your now unknown honours, as the sons of God, shall be unfolded in full magnificence ; and your sanctification shall advance to confirmed and perfect purity. From that happy period, millions of ages shall roll on in joyful succession ; and nothing

thing shall remain of all your present sorrows and discouragements, but the remembrance of that friendly hand which sustained you under them, and conducted the trial of your faith, so as to be 'found unto praise and honour, and glory, at his coming.' In this grateful recollection do the redeemed above join for ever in the unwearied repetition of that triumphant song, 'Unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever *. Amen.'

* Revelations, i. 5. 6.

SERMON

(217)

S E R M O N VIII.

ON THE EVERLASTING ADMIRATION OF
CHRIST IN THE HEAVENLY STATE.

REVELATION, v. 12.

*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to
receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and
strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*

SUCH is the grateful, admiring song of
the innumerable company which sur-
rounds the throne of God in the temple a-
bove. Those happy spirits, whose redemp-
tion is now complete, and who behold the
Lamb as it had been slain in the midst of

'the throne,' cease not, day nor night, to resound, in perfect unison of heart and voice, these joyful acclamations of praise. No infirmity suspends their fervent devotion; no sensual fetter chains down their soaring affections; no weariness in the organs of praise makes silence in the heavenly choir.

Our situation, in this imperfect, polluted world, admits neither of their unmixed joys, nor of their unceasing services. We cannot lift our voices to the same full and exalted note, nor can we continue to exert them, even in the feeble strains which they are able to reach; yet, on such an occasion as the present *, it is surely both becoming and delightful to exert our utmost powers in emulation of that glorious company whom we hope one day to join. We indeed are still in the lower temple; we see not, as they do, 'face to face,' the Lamb that was slain; but the symbols we are this day

* Preached at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

day to take in our hands represent him as the precious and immaculate VICTIM, who, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. — Let us then inquire into some of those views which give rise to the everlasting admiration of Christ in the heavenly state; and which ought now, according to the measure of which we are capable, to accompany the solemn act of devotion in which we are to be engaged.

I. Let us consider the ORIGINAL DIGNITY of this glorious VICTIM, as a source of the admiration expressed in the sublime accents of praise recorded in the text. They who stand around the throne discern that dignity in its full lustre; they behold it shedding rays of glory in his former humble state, and brightening the splendour of that majesty and dominion to which he is now exalted. It fills them with that sense of wonder and delight which the mind feels in

in reviewing the early presages of an illustrious character, now unfolded in full magnificence. They remember his entrance into the world—not embellished with the parade of earthly pomp—but announced by the ‘voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight *’; celebrated by the music of angels, and the acclamations of the ‘heavenly hosts, praising God, and ‘saying, Glory to God in the highest, and ‘on earth peace, good will towards men †.’ They remember his baptism, at which there was no preparation of worldly magnificence;—but the ‘heaven was opened, ‘and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a ‘voice came from heaven, which said, ‘Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am ‘well pleased ‡.’ They remember the progressive scenes of his life,—not rendered illustrious by the favour of the great, the mighty,

* Matthew, iii. 3.

† Luke ii. 13.

‡ Ibid. iii. 22.

mighty, or the noble, upon earth;—but in which angels came and ministered to him;—heavenly visitors descended to converse with him;—and the elements of nature yielded obedience to his word.

They remember his death;—that concluding scene, in which he stood alone;—neither supported by the applause of the multitude, nor even by the sympathy of his chosen friends;—but in which, forsaken and wretched as he appeared, stupendous tokens, in heaven and on earth, proclaimed that he was no common sufferer. The sun withdrew his light, the earth shook to its centre, the veil of the temple was rent, and the graves sent forth their inhabitants, to attest the victory obtained over death and the powers of darkness.

Those rays of glory which shone through the meanest circumstances that marked the period of the Redeemer's abasement; those tokens which bare witness to his Majesty in the midst of weakness; form a delightful and interesting view, in which they
who

who stand around the throne behold the
 'Lamb that was slain.' To them they appear in their full connection with his antecedent dignity, and actual exaltation. They swell and elevate those accents of praise in which they sing, '*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*'

To us who are still in the lower temple, the consideration of these things confirms our trust in him as the SAVIOUR, and ought now to increase our faith, and kindle our devotion, in commemorating his dying love. They proclaim to us, that this illustrious sufferer was the same whom the Prophet Isaiah described in these magnificent terms: 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace *.—' They proclaim the glory

* Isaiah, ix. 6.

‘glory of the Word made flesh, the glory
‘as of the only begotten of the Father, full
‘of grace and truth;—who being in the
‘form of God, thought it not robbery to
‘be equal with God; but made himself of
‘no reputation, and took upon him the
‘form of a servant, and was made in the
‘likeness of men; and, being found in fa-
‘shion as a man, humbled himself, and be-
‘came obedient to the death, even the death
‘of the cross*.’

II. Let us consider the LABOURS and
SUFFERINGS through which our Redeemer
attained the glory he now enjoys, as a
source of the admiration expressed in the
sublime language of the text. Behold him
in the counsels of eternity undertaking that
generous mediation, which alone could save
the guilty race of man. ‘Sacrifice and of-
‘fering thou wouldst not, but a body hast
‘thou prepared me. In burnt offerings and
‘sacrifices for sin thou hast had no plea-
‘sure :

* John, i. 14; Pilipp. ii. 6.—8.

sure: Then said I, Lo! I come (in the volume of thy book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God*. Behold him, in the fulness of time, leaving the mansions of glory, and submitting to be clothed with the infirmities of mortal flesh. Review the unceasing train of evils which marked the course of his days, and represented him to human estimation, as 'stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.' Let this review be accompanied with the reflection, that he was fully apprised of these sufferings in all their variety and extent. Behold him under the awful forebodings of the 'hour and power of darkness,' pouring out 'prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him †.' Behold the resignation of his spirit, overcoming this reluctance of his human nature, to enter on the dreadful scene he had in view. See him rising from the conflict, and calmly going

* Hebrews, x. 56.

† Ibid. v. 7.

going forth to meet his enemies,—saluted with the traiterous kifs,—bound with shackles,—led away to a tribunal where even the *form* of justice was a stranger;—buffeted, scourged, and spit upon,—forsaken of all his disciples;—at last, nailed to a cross, and insulted with brutal mockery, even in his expiring moments. When you have beheld this deep and complicated scene of anguish, say if there was ever ‘sorrow like unto the sorrow wherewith he was afflicted, in the day’ when the ‘chastisement of our peace was laid on him.’—Yet far beyond these visible sufferings must have been the mysterious feelings of the Redeemer, when he cried out, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me *!’

Such were the labours and sufferings through which Christ attained the glory he now enjoys as the exalted Redeemer.—If, then, the success of conspicuous merit be an object of just applause; if the Hero is admired,

F f

mired,

* Matthew, xxvii. 46.

mired, who, through toils and dangers, hath earned a glorious reputation, and shining reward; if there is delight in seeing oppressed virtue emerge from the depth of adversity, and gain its proper station and happiness;—in a word, if consummate excellence of character, proved by every trying circumstance, and at last rendered illustrious, by the attainment of resplendent dignity and power, be fitted to command esteem: All these feelings concur to inspire the accents of praise which resound in the temple above.—*‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.’* Here is an object suited to gratify the noblest feelings of the human mind,—the admiration of unspotted excellence, the sympathy with deep and generous sufferings, the triumph in vindicated innocence and rewarded virtue. What is there, in all the compass of thought, so great, so truly engaging, as such an object? How deep and tender an interest do we
take

take in the history,—nay, even in the fabulous representation of a good man struggling with calamity?—How keenly do we sympathise in his sufferings? How sincerely do we exult in the happy issue of his deliverance from them? But, what train of circumstances can the human mind conceive so important and interesting as those exhibited in the history of that glorious VICTIM whom the heavenly hosts celebrate in everlasting accents of praise? The first view in which he is beheld, is that of a destitute persecuted man, struggling with adversity, and overwhelmed with reproach,—yet displaying the heroism of benevolence, and the triumphs of patience, amid inextricable sorrows. But we are not left under the bitter feelings of regret and indignation, on account of injuries never redressed. We see the gloomy scene opening to a glorious and triumphant issue. We see the generous champion, who ‘trod the wine press alone,’ returning with the prize of his labours and sufferings,—‘glorious

'rious in his apparel, travelling in the
 'greatness of his strength *.' We see all
 his enemies conquered in the moment of
 their seeming triumph. We see him, who
 was crucified in weakness, rising again in
 power, glowing with the bloom of immor-
 tality, mighty to accomplish the whole plan
 of salvation. We see him, who once en-
 dured 'the contradiction of sinners,' now
 celebrated with the praises of angels and
 archangels, and the 'spirits of just men
 'made perfect.' Thus was the 'Captain
 'of salvation made perfect through suffer-
 'ing.' Thus was his character adorned
 with that consummate beauty and excel-
 lence which will command the admiration
 of the ransomed company above through
 eternal ages.

III. These past labours and sufferings of
 the Redeemer are considered by those who
 stand round the throne, not merely as the
 trial and illustration of his exalted charac-
 ter,

ter, but as the price of their own admission into his blissful presence. They view him in the precise light of the 'LAMB that was slain,'—in whose blood 'their robes have been washed and made white, that they might be accounted worthy to appear before the throne of God *.' They look back on his sufferings, not as arising from the general lot of humanity ;—on his death, not as the common debt to which all the posterity of Adam was made subject. They remember that he became poor and afflicted of his own choice ; that he had 'power to lay down his life, and to take it up again ;'—that he did what none but himself could do, in generously surrendering a life which was truly his own, a ransom for sin, with which he was wholly undefiled.

In this light we are now to view him in the sacrament of the supper. We are to commemorate his death,—not merely as an example

* Revel. vii. 14. 15.

example of patience,—not merely as a testimony to the truth of his doctrine, but as a REAL SACRIFICE and ATONEMENT for SIN.—All we, like sheep, ‘had gone astray,’—‘and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all *.’—‘He, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him †;’ or, as it is still more emphatically expressed, ‘God set forth his son to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins,—that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus ‡.’

On this doctrine of the ATONEMENT by the death of Jesus is founded all the comfort which his religion affords to sinners. Without it, *Christianity* would no longer deserve the name of the *Gospel*. Without it, no intelligible account can be given of the Old Testament dispensation,

* Isaiah, liii. 6.

† 2 Corinth. v. 21.

‡ Rom. iii. 25, 26.

tion. All the laws concerning sacrifices must appear no better than a system of frivolous ceremonies, unless we regard them as pointing towards a victim of sufficient worth to expiate that guilt which it was 'not possible that the blood of bulls or of goats could take away*.' Until we thus view Christ as bearing our iniquities in his own body on the accursed tree; until we regard him on the cross in a light exactly corresponding to those types by which he is represented under the law;—we are strangers to the essence of Christianity; the Scriptures are, with respect to us, a sealed book: And we have never yet beheld the Saviour of men.

On the other hand, how interesting an object, how worthy of eternal admiration, is Jesus, considered as the 'LAMB that was slain for us!' Is it surprising that the unwearied songs of the redeemed should for ever resound in the higher temple,
unto

* Hebrews, x. 4

‘unto him that loved them, and washed
 ‘them from their sins in his own blood,
 ‘and hath made them kings and priests
 ‘unto God, and his Father *?’

Here, then, we come to the proper employment of our minds in the solemn service of this day. Here, therefore, let us concentrate our views to behold that wonderful object which angels themselves desire to look into. Let us remember the agony of body, the consternation of soul which the Saviour endured in his conflict with the powers of darkness. Let us view him hanging on the cross.—And, while we thus contemplate an event unexampled in the annals of the universe,—the independent Creator suffering in the room of his guilty creatures, let us stir up our souls, and all that is within us, to bless and adore this spotless VICTIM, by whose precious blood our lives have been redeemed from destruction. Let us cherish that grateful

* Revel. i. 56.

ful admiration which inspires the heavenly anthem recorded in the text.—*‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.’*

IV. Let us consider the great and beneficial purposes accomplished by the mediation of Christ as a source of the eternal admiration which he receives in heaven. To those, indeed, who stand around the throne, this sublime view is more laid open than to us, *‘who know but in part, and see only through a glass darkly.’* Their capacities have been enlarged, to trace from its origin, in the everlasting counsels of heaven, to its completion in Christ’s resigning his mediatorial kingdom, the great purpose of the Parent of the universe, *‘that, in the dispensation of the fulness of time, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth *.’*

G g

They

* Ephes. i. 10.

They behold Jesus as the great instrument of carrying on this magnificent and propiti-
 ous plan. Their acclamations rise 'to
 ' him who is Alpha and Omega, the first
 ' and the last, who liveth and was dead,
 ' who is alive for evermore, and has the
 ' keys of hell and death *.'—In these views
 to which their minds can arise, doubtless, in
 a much higher degree than ours, they con-
 template with unceasing wonder the cha-
 racter and achievements of Jesus: They
 extol HIM who has restored order and
 happiness in the universe, who has rescued
 creation from the bondage under which
 it groaned, and accomplished the 'manifes-
 ' tation of the sons of God †.'

But, though our minds are incapable of
 fully entering into these sublime views, yet
 we know enough of the gracious purposes
 of Christ's mediation to make us join, ac-
 cording to the measure of our abilities, in
 the same song of praise. We know that it
 was

* Revel. i. 18.

† Romans, viii. 19.—27.

was not a small or trivial exigence which demanded the blood of this illustrious VICTIM;—that he died to reconcile heaven and earth, to procure a friendly meeting between Justice and Mercy, that both might shine with equal lustre in the salvation of believing sinners. We know also that these gracious purposes his death has fully accomplished. Having made his ‘soul an offering for sin,’ he has thereby consecrated a new and living way into the holiest of all, ‘through the vail of his own flesh *; so that all who are truly penitent may now ‘come boldly to the throne of grace, ‘that they may obtain mercy, and find ‘grace to help in time of need †.’ Nor is this all. Having expiated the guilt of his people by his atoning blood, he goes on to adorn them with his own perfect righteousness, to sanctify their nature by his grace and spirit, and to make them ‘perfect in ‘every good work to do his will.’ Having thus

* Hebrews, x. 20.

† Ibid. iv. 16.

thus redeemed their souls, both from the penalty and the power of sin, and conferred on them a principle of spiritual life; and progressive purity, he will in due time complete the work which he has begun; by releasing their bodies from the prison of the grave, and making their whole persons blessed in the everlasting enjoyment of God.—‘It hath pleased the Father that ‘in him should all fulness dwell *.’—All the fulness of present and future provision,—all the blessings of time, and all the blessings of eternity.

V. Let us consider the high and glorious station to which Christ is now advanced, in reward of his sufferings and death, as a source of the everlasting admiration which he receives in the heavenly state. ‘The ‘LAMB that was slain’ is now the ‘KING ‘whom God hath set on his holy hill of ‘Zion;’ and they who surround the glorious throne on which he sits, have had ‘the

* Coloss. i. 19.

the eyes of their understanding enlightened, to know the exceeding greatness of that power which God wrought in him when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion,—and gave him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If, then, the 'FATHER of GLORY' has so highly honoured this illustrious VICTIM;—if the infallible Judge of merit has thus openly declared his approbation of all that he did as Mediator;—if, in so conspicuous a manner, he has called the attention of the UNIVERSE to the recompense bestowed on the Redeemer:—Surely the voices of those
who

Ephes. i. 18.—21.; Philipp. ii. 9.—11.

who are ' with him where he is, and who
 ' see the glory which has been given him *,
 cannot be wanting in that magnificent Cho-
 rus which celebrates the praises of this once
 suffering but now exalted Saviour.—*Their*
 voices cannot be wanting, whose interest
 in his glorious achievements is greater than
 that of any other class of beings. He is
 LORD of ALL; but he is their Redeemer.
 For them he quitted the mansions of glo-
 ry, submitted to the miseries of this life,
 and tasted the bitterness of death. For them
 he ' loosed the seals of that book, which
 ' none else in heaven or in earth was able
 ' to open : Therefore they fall down before
 ' the LAMB, having every one of them
 ' harps, and golden vials full of odours,
 ' which are the prayers of saints. And they
 ' sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy
 ' to take the book, and to open the seals
 ' thereof : For thou wast slain, and hast re-
 ' deemed us to God by thy blood, out of
 ' every

* John, xviii. 24.

every kindred, and tongue, and people,
and nation. And hast made us unto our
God kings and priests.*

To Us, who are still in the lower temple,
let it be a motive to join in this song, that
our Redeemer in the high and glorious
station to which he is now advanced, still
retains the same tenderness as ever for his
people on earth. Though changed in out-
ward circumstances, he is not changed with
regard to the condescension and meekness
of his character. The LAMB in the midst
of the throne is no less meek and gentle
than the lamb once led to the slaughter.
Power and dignity have not altered his na-
ture. He is the same yesterday, to day,
and forever. — Unchangeable in his love,
and everlasting in his compassion. *Wor-
thy, therefore, is the Lamb that was
slain, to receive power, and riches, and
wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glo-
ry, and blessing.*

This

This subject might admit of an extensive improvement. I might, if time allowed, address myself to those who have never yet seen any thing worthy of admiration in the character of the 'LAMB that was slain.' I might expostulate with them on the blindness of their minds, and the base ingratitude of their hearts. I might represent to them the dreadful danger to which they expose themselves, and paint the terrors of that day, when they shall see him whom they have pierced coming in the clouds, with power and great glory ;—when the despisers of his grace shall, in the bitterness of their anguish, call upon the 'mountains and rocks to fall on them, and 'hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the LAMB *.'—But I am unwilling to detain you much longer from the proper service of the day.—This only let me inquire of such contemptuous and ungrateful

* Revelations, vi. 16,

grateful men, whether they have measured the power of that wrath which they are thus bold to defy?—Can you calmly survey yourselves as the devoted objects of all that vengeance which Almighty Power, incensed by the abuse of long-suffering goodness, is able to inflict? Are you determined to persist in your infatuated enmity until you have extorted an irrevocable doom from that God who has sworn by himself that he desireth not the death of sinners?—While I would thus ‘persuade you by the terrors,’ I would also ‘beseech you by the mercy of God, that ye harden not your hearts.’ That mercy, though long abused, is still in your offer. O then listen this day to the invitations of his grace; and may he who is ‘exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and the remission of sins,’ snatch from you the unhallowed weapons of your rebellion, and make you a ‘willing people in the day of his power.’

H h As

As for you to whom Christ is precious, in all those views we have endeavoured to take of him as the 'LAMB that was slain,' and who long to join the glorious company that celebrates his praises around the throne, it is but meet that I address you with the voice of salutation: 'Grace be unto you, and peace, from him who is, and who was, and who is to come *'—'Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the LAMB.—' Be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him †.' He is this day inviting you to a foretaste of those fruits which forever bloom in the paradise of God. He is calling on you to begin, in the sanctuary below, the employment of perfect spirits in the temple above. Let us then come up to his table with grateful, admiring hearts; and with the symbols of his broken body and shed blood in our hands; let us declare, before men and angels, that we 'glory in the cross of Christ,'
and

* Revelations, i. 4.

† Ibid. xix. 9.

and that we esteem *'the Lamb that was slain worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.'*

SERMON

S E R M O N IX.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF LOVE TO CHRIST.

JOHN, xiv. 15.

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

OUR relish of the highest pleasures,
—our delight in the happiest connections of life, are both apt to languish in the calm of uninterrupted possession. The prospect of losing these sources of enjoyment, on the

the other hand, has the immediate effect of reviving our value for them in all its ardour. Thus, we may be long unconscious how much of our happiness is treasured up in a friend to whose conversation we have always had easy access. Such an advantage, like the common blessings of air and light, becomes familiar through habit, and often decays, as to sensible esteem, in proportion to its real importance to our happiness. But the case is altered when the hour of separation arrives. We are then led to feel and to express the full measure of that love and attachment, which formerly were perhaps equally concealed from our own consciousness, and from the knowledge of the person who possessed them.

A situation of this kind gave occasion to the discourse of which the text is a part. Our Saviour had lately apprised his disciples of his approaching departure from them; an event, to which, notwithstanding all the considerations with which he had fortified their minds, they looked forward,

in

in deep despondency, as the period of all their hopes. Overwhelmed with the feelings of natural sorrow, and disabled by their confined views of his character, from understanding the full import of the consolations he addressed to them, they were doomed to pass a sad interval of anguish and suspense. But, though they were thus disappointed in the hopes they had conceived from the protection and patronage of their Master; yet they had not forgotten his past kindness; their hearts glowed with tender feelings: And they were ready, or at least thought themselves ready, to give him the most costly proofs of their love. Our Lord saw this conflict of feelings in their breasts; and, while he soothed their grief with many a gracious promise, he took occasion, at the same time, to lay down an evidence, by which they might try the sincerity of that love which they were all so forward in expressing,

‘If ye love me, keep my commandments.’

‘It

‘ It is not the mere attachment to my per-
‘ son ; it is not the delight in my society ;
‘ it is not the tribute of sorrow and tears,
‘ when I leave you, that I request of you,
‘ my disciples. These are, indeed, marks
‘ of your regard, which I cannot condemn.
‘ But still they are mere human emotions,
‘ nowise decisive of your character as my
‘ genuine followers. If ye love me truly,
‘ if ye desire to honour my memory accep-
‘ tably, and to promote the cause for which
‘ I am now about to lay down my life,—
“ **KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS.**”

In obedience to the latest command of our Saviour *, we are this day met together to commemorate his death in the holy ordinance of the Supper. I trust that, like his disciples, in the affecting interview of which the text is a part, our hearts glow with love to him. But, as there is still a danger of mistaking mere human emotions for those genuine and enlightened affections with

- 29 Preached at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

with which we ought to celebrate the memorial of his death, I propose, through divine assistance,

I. To distinguish the true grounds of love to Christ, as the SAVIOUR, from those partial and transient feelings which are sometimes mistaken for it.

II. To point out the tendency of a real love to him, and shew how it is influenced by the peculiar character of our Divine Redeemer as its object.—The illustration of these particulars will, I trust, make it evident that the only proper and satisfying proof of our love to Christ is that which he himself has laid down in the text.—*‘If ye love me, keep my commandments.’*

I begin with distinguishing the true grounds of love to Christ as the SAVIOUR, from those partial and transient feelings which are sometimes mistaken for it.

1. It is obvious that love to Christ as the SAVIOUR must take its rise from just views of his character as a Divine Person, and Heavenly Messenger. Although the ex-
ample

ample of human attachments may furnish an illustration of some of those sentiments with which we ought to regard our Saviour ; yet we must take a higher standard for explaining the genuine affection which he requires from his disciples. It differs entirely from the sudden and vague admiration which is sometimes excited by the specious qualities of a character ; nay, it differs, in many points, from the most respectable attachments that can be formed between mortals. Even in the most perfect of our fellow creatures, prolonged and intimate acquaintance brings to light many weaknesses and defects. The glare that dazzled from afar, is found tarnished with a multitude of spots which a distant view could not discover. But the glow of sudden admiration was not likely to have been excited by the appearance of our Saviour ; or, if it had, would have been unsuitable to his real character. He had none of those showy qualities which attract the passing eye. Born in mean circumstances, and educated

in obscurity, when at length he was introduced to the notice of the men of that age, it was by nothing desirable in their eyes. 'He grew up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground *.' But, under this veil, which intercepted the admiration of the multitude, was hid a character fairer than that of the sons of men;—a character which can never be sufficiently estimated, while we consider him only as an individual of the human race. As such, indeed, he was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.' But, while clothed with all the relations, he fulfilled all the duties of a man, we are to consider that he humbled himself, when he was thus found in the human form. Unlike to the ordinary descendents of Adam, the form and weaknesses of mortality were assumed of his free choice, not imposed on him by the necessary condition of his being. Relinquishing, for a season, the original glory which

* Isaiah, liii. 2.

which he had with the Father, he voluntarily assumed the human nature, that, as its second representative, he might suffer the penalty, and repair the ruins, occasioned by the apostacy of the first. This consideration raises his character far above any that ever appeared on earth. Let the disciples of Jesus never allow it to slip out of their minds. It is the foundation and corner stone of all our faith, and confidence, and hope. Without taking it along with us, his whole history is dark and inextricable. We may admire in it the virtues, or we may be touched with compassion for the sufferings of an uncommon person ; but our broken and imperfect conceptions will never amount to the knowledge of the ' grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, ' though he was rich, yet, for our sakes, he ' became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich *.' Hence those who knew him only after the flesh, that is, in
his

* 2 Corinth. viii. 9.

his *human* relations alone, might be ignorant of him in the most important respects, and even be the avowed enemies of his doctrine and laws. This was actually the case. His brethren believed not on him, and his countrymen paid him no respect. 'Is not this,' said they, 'the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Josès, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him *.'

Observe, on the other hand, how forcibly our Lord inculcates this idea of the public character which he sustained. 'I am come,' saith he, 'a light into the world. He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, (i. e. regards me not merely as a private teacher of truth and virtue), but on him that sent me †.' 'He that is not for me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad ‡.' One leading view of his character,

* Mark, vi. 3.

† John, xii. 44.

‡ Matthew, xii. 30.

rafter, in this respect, is that of a Teacher sent of God. Considered in this capacity, it is not enough that we admire the purity and simplicity of his doctrine. These have obtained the admiration of many who deny the truth of his divine mission. It is not enough that we acknowledge the excellence of life and conduct by which he exemplified the precepts he taught. These were acknowledged by Judas, who betrayed him, and by Pilate, who gave the warrant for his crucifixion *. We must go a step farther, and consider the authority on which he spake and acted. The very outward appearance of this authority attracted the attention of all who beheld him; and what was the answer he made to his enemies, when they called it in question? Do we find him in any degree retracting or explaining away his pretensions? When, for instance, the Jews accused him of blasphemy, because that, (in their own words),
' being

* Matthew, xxvii. 4.; Ibid. 24.

‘being a man, he made himself God,’ does he deny the fact on which this charge was founded? No.—He boldly appeals to the evidence by which he justified his claim. ‘If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But, if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him *.’ From these views of our Lord’s character, as a divine Person, and heavenly Messenger, it is plain that a mere personal attachment was far from amounting to that kind of regard which he expected from his followers. It was not attention to his interests as a man; it was not a solicitous regard to his ease or accommodation, that he required of those who called themselves his friends: But it was attention to his doctrine, and respect for his authority as a Teacher sent from heaven. ‘Martha, Martha,’ said he to one who was cumbered with the former species of

* John, x. 37.

of solicitude, 'thou art careful and troubled
'about many things. But one thing is
'needful, and Mary (who sat at his feet,
'and heard his word) hath chosen that
'good part, which shall not be taken from
'her *.' On another occasion, too, when,
as he was employed in declaring the great
truths of Religion, one interrupted him,
saying, 'Behold, thy mother and thy bre-
'thren stand without, desiring to speak
'with thee; Jesus, we are told, answered
'and said unto him that told him,—Who is
'my mother? and who are my brethren?
'And he stretched forth his hands towards
'his disciples, and said, 'Behold my mother
'and my brethren. For whosoever shall
'do the will of my Father which is in hea-
'ven, the same is my brother and sister,
'and mother †.'

2. Love to Christ must be founded on
just conceptions of the purposes for which
he was manifested in the world. It was
the

* Luke, x. 41. 42.

† Matthæw, xii. 47, &c.

the great error of the Jews, and the chief cause of their enmity to Christ, that they expected their Messiah to be a temporal prince and deliverer. Strangers to the idea of a spiritual kingdom, they misinterpreted the prophetical descriptions of it, and could by no means discover, in the lowly appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, a title to the sublime character of David's Son and Successor, and the Restorer of the Sceptre to Israel. Even the Apostles of our Lord were long subject to the same prejudice, as appears from their contentions among themselves about pre-eminence, and from the horror which they testified on being forewarned of his sufferings and death. They knew not, or were unwilling to believe, that the 'Captain of their Salvation should 'be made perfect through suffering.' Often, indeed, had our Lord signified to them, in terms more or less explicit, that he was about to be withdrawn from them; and, in the chapter from which the text is taken, he endeavours to prepare them for that

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that event by the most tender spiritual consolations. But these, it would seem, they were as yet unable fully to comprehend or relish. Still they regretted the disappointment of their worldly expectations, and probably continued to do so, until the accomplishment of the gracious promise, that the Comforter, whom the Father was to send in his name, should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them. Then, at last, they were convinced that Christ's kingdom was not of this world, and that no plans of temporal grandeur or ambition entered into the system of his religion. Then they were led to understand both the nature of that slavery from which he came to rescue, and of that empire to which he was to raise his faithful followers.

Of these defective views of the purposes for which Christ was manifested in the world, combined with a strong personal attachment to him, we have a striking illustration in the 16th chapter of the Gospel

by Matthew, at the 21st verse, where we are told, that, 'from that time forth, began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord. This shall not be unto thee.'—Here was an expression of strong personal attachment. Peter loved his Master, and deprecated every event that was to involve him in distress or suffering. But, did his Master express his approbation of this sentiment? Quite the reverse. 'He turned, and said unto Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou sa- vourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."'

By our situation in *this age* of the world, we are not exposed to be misled by the same feelings which actuated Peter, as the personal friend and companion of Jesus. But, still there are sources of delusion, a-
gainst

against which we ought to be on our guard. We attend, for instance, to the history of Jesus; and our affections are seemingly engaged by it. We celebrate the memorial of his death; and the glow of what we take to be devout feelings arises in our breast. But, perhaps, we mistake that speculative esteem of character, that admiration of heroic virtue, and that sympathy with generous sufferings, which a fictitious history might excite, for the deep interest which a sense of guilt and wretchedness gives the believing penitent in the Gospel, as the history of the Saviour of men. I therefore proceed to observe,

3. That love to Christ must be founded on a proper sense of the nature and value of those benefits which he has procured for us by his sufferings and death. For this purpose, it is necessary that we be duly affected with a conviction of our guilty and miserable state by nature. At the time of our Saviour's appearance on earth, mankind, in general, were involved in a darkness

ness so thick, as to hide from their own eyes the misery of their condition. In the greater part of the world, Superstition and Idolatry had grown to such a pitch, as to obliterate, in a great degree, the distinctions between moral good and evil. They trusted to obtain the favour of heaven by frivolous ceremonies, and to avert its wrath by absurd or inhuman modes of expiation. In the land of Judea, the scene of our Lord's personal ministry, the perversion of the religion of their forefathers, joined with bigotry and pride, had produced nearly as fatal effects. The two principal sects into which the Jews were divided, agreed in nothing but in a disposition to contemn and reject every teacher who pretended to greater wisdom than themselves. This was peculiarly the character of the Pharisees. Relying on those privileges with which God had distinguished their nation, they boasted that they were Abraham's children; and, while they fulfilled the ritual parts of their religion, imagined that nothing beyond this

was

was requisite towards their acceptance with God.

To persons thus misled by false principles, and by the delusions of spiritual pride, our Lord had no qualifications to recommend him. 'He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.' The case is the same in all ages. It is impossible for those, who are satisfied with their actual condition, to feel any high regard for one who offers himself to them in the character of a SAVIOUR. 'They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick *.' Those only who feel the sharpness and malignity of the disease that consumes them, will look to Jesus with the same earnest regards with which the Israelites of old looked to the brazen serpent in the Wilderness. They alone will direct the eye of faith to him, 'whom having not seen, they love; in whom, though now they see him not, yet believing, they rejoice

* Mark ii. 17.

'rejoice with a joy unspeakable, and full
 'of glory *.' Nor will they esteem and
 value him merely as a Saviour from the
 guilt and punishment of sin. He will be
 no less precious to them, as the purchaser
 of those sanctifying influences of the Holy
 Spirit, by which their corruptions are sub-
 dued, and the spiritual life begun and car-
 ried on in their souls. They love him, not
 only on account of what he did and suffer-
 ed for them on earth, but also on account
 of what his purchased Spirit does in renew-
 ing their nature; on account of what he is
 still doing for them, by his intercession at
 the right hand of God: On account of what
 he will yet do for them, when he shall
 'come the second time, without sin, unto
 'salvation.'

Having thus endeavoured to distinguish
 the true grounds of love to Christ as the
 Saviour, from those partial and transient
 feelings which are sometimes mistaken for
 it, I proceed,

II.

† 1 Peter, i. 8.

II. To point out the tendency of a real love to him, and shew how it is influenced by the exalted character of our Redeemer as its object.

With regard to the general tendency of the affection of love, these three circumstances may be observed.

1. It is one of the most powerful affections in our nature, and calls forth every faculty we possess, in pursuit of its own ends,—the chief of which is to gratify and obtain the approbation of the beloved object.

2. It is an affection which leads us to the imitation of the person whom we love.

3. It is an affection which, (when deprived of its object by absence or death), fixes itself on any memorials or pledges by which its feelings may be kept alive.

In the remaining part of this discourse, I shall consider how the affection of love is influenced in each of these views by the exalted character of our Redeemer as its object.

264 *On the Evidence of Love to Christ*

1st. It may be observed that our love to Christ would be totally misguided, in attempting to return our obligations to him, as we do in those human attachments of which it is the principle. It is perhaps a natural suggestion, to a mind full of affection to the Saviour, that his companions and disciples, during his abode on earth, had the means of shewing their love to him more than we whose lot is cast in these latter ages. Had we lived with him while he sojourned among men, we are ready to think that our admiration, gratitude, and attachment, would have known no bounds. We imagine ourselves united in the delightful intercourse of friendship with the Saviour of mankind, attending his steps, and ministering to his accommodation, during the whole progress of his afflicted life; and surely we think we would not have forsaken him at his death. These feelings may be suggested by a devout imagination. But, let us call in our thoughts from the excursive range of fancy, and fix them on

our

our actual condition. Our eyes have not seen the person of the Saviour of men ; we shall never minister to his necessities ; we shall never ‘ pour precious ointment ’ on his body, or wash his feet with tears, ‘ and dry them with the hair of our head *.’ He is now far exalted above the reach or the need of these services. Nevertheless, our connection with him is not dissolved. There are still channels by which our duty, regard, and affection, can reach the throne of glory on which he is seated on high. Your exalted Redeemer, O Christians ! bends his eye from heaven, not to look to the ‘ stately temple, adorned with goodly stones and gifts,’ nor to the worldly pomp of worship within it ; but to see how ye honour his truth and doctrine, by a ‘ conversation becoming his gospel ;’ to see how the good word which he sowed grows up to ‘ the peaceable fruits of righteousness ;’ to see whether ye

L 1

‘ love

* Luke, vii. 38.

‘ love one another, as he gave command-
 ‘ ment ;’ whether ye minister to the necessi-
 ties of his indigent members ; in fine, whe-
 ther, as ‘ lively stones, ye are built up a spi-
 ‘ ritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer
 ‘ up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God
 ‘ by Jesus Christ.’ This is the travel of his
 soul which he sees from on high, and is
 satisfied. ‘ Herein is he glorified, that ye
 ‘ bring forth much fruit ; so shall ye be his
 ‘ disciples indeed *.’

2. Love inclines us to the imitation of
 the person on whom it is placed. In this
 respect, the love of Christ is most happily
 influenced by the object whom it regards.
 In him we have an example which we may
 universally follow ; and the only one which
 we may thus follow, without exception, or
 danger of being misled. Teachers of vir-
 tue had appeared before him. Ideal sys-
 tems, intended for the reformation of a bu-
 sy and corrupt world, had issued from the
 closets

* John, xv. 8.

closets of Sages and Philosophers. False Religion, too, had pretended to labour in the same field. ‘The Pharisees bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men’s shoulders, while they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.’ Our Lord saw their want of consistency, and pointed it out to his disciples, and to the multitude, who heard him. ‘The Scribes and Pharisees,’ said he, ‘sit on Moses’ seat. All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not*.’ But Jesus acted, in every instance, as he taught; insomuch that the most comprehensive rule which he ever delivered was in these few words. ‘If any man serve me, let him follow me†.’ The Apostle Paul, in like manner, expresses the sum of our duty, as his disciples, in this: ‘Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ

* Matthew, xxiii. 2.—4.

† John, xii. 26.

‘Christ Jesus *.’ In imitating an example of such unspotted purity and excellence, we must indeed fall short of the standard; but we are in no danger of error: For the love that could transform us into his whole image would be the ‘perfect fulfilling of the law.’

3. Love is an affection which, when deprived of its object by absence or death, fixes itself on any memorials or pledges by which its peculiar feelings may be kept alive. Nothing is so deeply engraven on an affectionate mind as the remembrance of a departed friend. To muse on the objects of our fervent and everlasting affection, to dwell, in thought, on the great and excellent qualities which rendered our intercourse with them both useful and pleasant, is often the chief delight left us on earth. In the midst of scenes exhilarating to others, *their* image and virtues croud on our remembrance; and our most interesting moments

* Philipp. ii. 3.

moments are those devoted to this tender recollection. To a person impressed with such feelings, there will be a peculiar pleasure in contemplating whatever memorials can either, by a natural association, or by some positive appointment, convey them with more energy towards their object.

Such, in some respects, is the situation of the Christian. His eyes, indeed, have never beheld the person of Jesus. But he loves and venerates the unseen Saviour. He acknowledges and feels the obligations under which he lies to his generous love. His soul rises towards him in ardent gratitude, and pants for opportunities of expressing its glowing affections.—The COMMANDMENTS of Christ are the MEMORIALS and PLEDGES which he has left us to keep in his absence. ‘If ye keep my commandments,’ said he to his disciples, ‘ye shall abide in my love*.’ Raise no splendid altars, consecrate no images,
burn

* John, xv. 10.

burn no incense, but ‘ abide in me, and let
 ‘ my words abide in you, even those things
 ‘ which I have spoken to you, that my joy
 ‘ may remain in you, and that your joy
 ‘ may be full. In my Father’s house are
 ‘ many mansions; if it were not so, I
 ‘ would have told you. I go to prepare a
 ‘ place for you. Mean time, I will not
 ‘ leave you comfortless. I will pray the
 ‘ Father, and he shall give you another
 ‘ Comforter, who shall teach you all things,
 ‘ and bring all things to your remembrance,
 ‘ whatsoever I have said unto you *.’—If,
 then, a sacred regard to whatever has been
 memorable in the conduct or in the sayings
 of those whom we have loved on earth, be
 cherished as a source of pleasure, how much
 more ought we to cultivate the like feel-
 ings with regard to our absent, our now
 exalted Redeemer? Directed to him, this
 is no vain tribute, grateful only to the ima-
 gination of him who pays it. Your Friend,
 your

* John, xiv. passim.

your beloved Saviour, O Christian ! is not separated from you forever. ' He will ' come again.' Even now he knows and regards every movement of our affections towards him. Even now he is in the midst of us, ready to manifest himself to the believing soul, in another manner than he does unto the world. Do you ask, with the wondering Apostle, ' Lord, how is it ' that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, ' and not unto the world ?' Hear his own reply to this question, ' If a man love me, ' he will keep my words, and my Father ' will love him, and we will come unto ' him, and make our abode with him*.'

Hitherto I have been speaking of the commandments of our Lord, in general, as memorials and pledges which he has left us to keep in his absence: But the occasion of our meeting leads me to speak of *one* command that is peculiarly binding in this respect;—his latest and dying command,

* John, xiv. 22. 23.

mand, when he took bread and wine, and distributed them to his disciples, saying, 'This do in remembrance of me.' And O! shall we disregard what he enjoined, at a season so interesting, and in a manner so solemn and affectionate? No; we will remember thy love, O thou unwearied Benefactor of men! more than all the achievements of the sons of renown. 'We will take the cup of salvation, and call on thy name. We will offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving in the courts of the Lord's house, and pay our vows in the presence of all his people.'

And, when we return from this table, shall we forget our engagements, and mingle as carelessly as ever with a vain, sensual, and ungodly world? Shall we shew a solicitous regard to this one command, that we may indulge in the neglect of all the rest? Ah! what shall it then avail us, that we have eaten and drunk in the presence of our Redeemer, and that a temporary glow of affections has been excited

cited by the solemnity of the service. This is no test of our being his true disciples. —While, therefore, we approach the holy table with outward tokens of respect to the Lord Jesus Christ, let each of us seriously ponder what he himself has declared : ‘ Not
‘ every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,
‘ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven,
‘ but he that doth the will of my Father in
‘ heaven.’—‘ He that hath my command-
‘ ments, and keepeth them, he it is that
‘ loveth me.*.’—‘ *If ye love me, keep my
‘ commandments.*’

* Matthew, vii. 21. ; John, xiv. 21.

Mm

SERMON

S E R M O N, X.

ON THE MEANS OF RECOMMENDING
THE RELIGION OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW, v. 16.

*Let your light so shine before men, that
they may see your good works, and glorify
your Father which is in heaven.*

WERE there not some *common prin-*
ciples in which mankind are uni-
versally agreed, it would be impossible for
the reason of one man to produce convic-
tion in the mind of another. Were there
not, in like manner, some *good works,*
which,

which, by their own light, recommend themselves to the approbation of all who behold them, it would be equally impossible to prepossess men in favour of any system of religion by its good effect on life and manners. The Religion of Christ appeals to both these standards. It challenges the most scrupulous investigation of the evidences on which it rests, and commands its disciples to be always 'ready to give a reason of the hope that is in them.' But, while it demands this readiness in *argument*, proportioned to the ability and knowledge of its disciples, it demands still more earnestly, and with less exception, that testimony in its favour which their *conduct* affords. This species of evidence is both more obvious to the world at large, and more within the power of every Christian to display to advantage. There is a dignity and beauty in the well proportioned assemblage of the virtues taught in the Gospel, which all men must honour and esteem. By means of this universal sentiment,

ment, we are exhorted in the text to recommend that religion which forms its disciples to so lovely a character. By cultivating those ornaments of temper and conduct which all men approve and admire, we are to solicit their favourable regard to that system of principles by which they are produced and supported. This is plainly the import of our Saviour's doctrine in the text, and passage connected with it. 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' said he to his disciples, at the 13th verse, 'but, if the salt have lost his savour, where-
' with shall it be salted? it is thenceforth
' good for nothing, but to be cast out, and
' to be trodden under foot of men. Ye
' are the light of the world. A city that
' is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither
' do men light a candle and put it under a
' bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
' *Let your light so shine before men, that*
' *they may see your good works, and glorify*
' *your Father which is in heaven.*

Taking

Taking it for granted that you who have been professing your regard to Jesus, in so solemn a manner *, feel your obligation to exhibit his religion to advantage in the eyes of men; all that I propose in this discourse is to lay before you a few general rules of conduct, by attending to which you may hope for success in this important object.

I. AVOW yourselves to be CHRISTIANS.
'Men do not light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.' I mean not to recommend to you that ostentatious display of religion by which hypocrites seek to raise their character. But surely it is possible, without either study or effort, to let those around us know what are the principles we hold most sacred. It is not only *possible* to let them know this, but, if we be sincere, it is *impossible* to conceal it. The great features of character unfold themselves of their own

* Preached after the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

own accord to the observation of others. We soon learn to distinguish the selfish, the ambitious, the vain, the covetous, by the general train of their *conduct*, however they may attempt to disguise these vices by contrary *profession*. In like manner, the faith, devotion, and humility, of the Christian; the self-denial, simplicity, and godly sincerity, of his whole conversation, cannot fail, by a gradual but certain progress, to stamp his character even in the eyes of men, as a real disciple of Jesus.—The thing in question is to recommend religion. But, how shall we recommend it, if it be doubtful whether we be truly religious? There are plans of self-interest, there are decencies of life, which coincide with some of the precepts of religion. If no motive beyond these appear to animate our conduct, what credit can religion derive from us? ‘If the salt have thus lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?’ If the leaven have no qualities superior to the mass, how shall its virtue pervade it?

To recommend religion to others, it is first of all necessary that we be truly religious, and that we be known to be so. It must be no doubtful matter to those who observe us, what are the great motives which govern our conduct.

I begin with this direction, not only on account of its importance, but also with a view to obviate a common, and very dangerous mistake. It is supposed by many, that, in order to prevail with men to become Christians, we must meet them, as it were, on their own ground, and, by prudent compliances, though they should involve the sacrifice of certain scruples of our own, endeavour to gain their confidence and affection. In things altogether indifferent, this is allowable and proper. But, to a Christian, there is nothing so indifferent as to banish a religious motive in the performance of it. 'Whether he eats or drinks, or whatsoever he does, he does all to the glory of God.' Even in his compliances in things against which there is no law,

law, it is *religion*, and not the spirit of the *world*, that bends him. It is not personal ease or estimation that he seeks, but the welfare of immortal souls. It is the same motive which animated the great Apostle of the Gentiles, when he said, 'I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some *.'—Could we, indeed, engage men to make trial of the pleasures of religion, the point would be gained, and no more would be requisite for determining their choice towards wisdom and holiness. But the question before us is, whether an unsteady, temporizing conduct, on the part of Christians, would have so desirable an effect? Alas, no. We may thus procure admission into the haunts of riot and dissipation; we may gain for ourselves the misapplied appellation of liberality of mind; but, so far from promoting, we shall, on the contrary, dreadfully injure the cause of religion. Does it consist with
experience,

* 1 Corinth. ix. 22.

experience that the men of the world are so full of candour as to believe, when you thus meet them on their own ground, that your intentions are as pure as you affirm? No; they triumph in the supposition, that, instead of being a well meant concession on your part, such conduct is the effect of inclinations like their own;—inclinations only restrained by remaining prejudices from carrying you to the same excess of riot with themselves. Judge, then, whether it can possibly promote the interest of religion to expose it to these imputations. Is it to ‘make our light shine before men,’ to partake with them in the ‘unfruitful works of darkness?’ Will it dispose sinners to respect the principles of Christianity, that we appear loose and unfaithful in our own adherence to them? No; the only effect this can have will be to confirm them in their vices, and to expose us to their just contempt. Believe it, then, the first thing our works must shew is their own goodness. They can never prove the

N n goodness

goodness of the religion we profess till it be clear that they are conformed to the 'good, and acceptable, and perfect will of 'God.'

II. If you desire to exhibit the gospel to advantage in the eyes of men, you must adopt the spirit of it in every part of common life. You must shew that it has influence on the whole of your conduct, in rendering you more just, and faithful, and conscientious, in your different relations to mankind, than those who have no such powerful principles to govern them. It is vain to expect credit from principles which have no visible effect on our practice. To talk much about religion, and to be strict in its outward observances, while we are as worldly in our temper, as hard hearted and oppressive, as little to be trusted in our dealings as those who make no such professions.—Ah ! who shall be able to reconcile these things to Jesus when he comes again ? Who shall be able to atone for this scandal brought on his religion ? ' Wo
unto

‘unto the man through whom this offence
‘cometh. It were better for him that a
‘millstone were hanged about his neck, and
‘he cast into the midst of the sea.’—The
religion of Jesus is designed to extend its
influence over our behaviour in every scene
and transaction of life. It not only raises
our affections to soar in devotion towards
God; it also teaches us to walk humbly
before him in the exercise of those duties
which result from our various stations in
society. It not only elevates our views to-
wards another world, but also purifies our
conduct, and humanizeth our manners,
while we live in this.

Who, then, among us, glows with the
noble desire of recommending religion
to the love and respect of mankind, ‘let
‘him shew, out of a good conversa-
‘tion, his works with meekness of wis-
‘dom.’ Let him shew, in his temper and
‘conduct, that wisdom which is from a-
bove,

* Luke, xvii. 2.

‘bove, which is first pure, then peace-
 ‘able, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full
 ‘of mercy, and of good fruits, with-
 ‘out partiality, and without hypocrisy.’

Dream not of obtaining this object by mere professions, nor even by the most illustrious display of devout affections in the public solemnities of religion. In these duties we cannot be always engaged. But, to ‘behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way, to do justly, to love mercy, and to ‘walk humbly before God,’ as they are duties of perpetual obligation, so they are of obvious excellence in the eyes of all men. Life, in general, is the revolution of common occurrences, and of calls to ordinary duties. In these ordinary occurrences and duties we are to look for the theatre of our Christian virtues; and, though we may seldom have the opportunity of exciting high degrees of admiration, we can never want occasions of conciliating that calm respect and love which never fail to attend a steady and consistent character.

III, If you desire to exhibit the gospel to advantage in the eyes of men, you must study propriety in your religious conduct. By this I mean that you must make yourselves acquainted with the comparative importance, and just subordination, of particular duties, and beware of the error of those who, by an undue preference of less weighty and seasonable obligations, give occasion to those who lie in wait to find fault. Settle it in your minds that religion disavows the most splendid acts of external homage, when they displace the performance of any one plain and obvious duty: God himself declares it to be the service of a fool, when 'sacrifice,' or outward worship of any kind, is preferred to obedience *. Our Saviour taught the same truth, when he commanded the unreconciled person to 'leave his gift at the altar, 'first go and be reconciled to his brother, 'and then come and offer his gift †.' Let
not

* Compare Ecclesiastes, v. 6. ; and Proverbs, xxi. 3.

† Matthew, v. 23.]

not then your good be evil spoken of by such improprieties of conduct.

Beware also of the desire to gain distinction, by exercising yourselves in matters foreign from that station which the order of Providence has assigned you. When tempted by this species of ambition, ask yourselves the question, 'Am I a better judge of the proper sphere for the exertion of my talents than He who has already pointed it out to me by the place I occupy in society?—Is it fit for me to trust my own judgment, in opposition to the notice thus afforded me?'

By weighing the question under these considerations, you will probably see reason to adopt the maxim of the wise man, that, 'as a bird which wandereth from her nest, so is a man that leaves his place *.' Remember that Jesus Christ himself, the author and finisher of our faith, the pattern of our obedience as Christians, has left us

this

* Proverbs, xxvii. 8.

this lesson, in as much as, for the space of thirty years, that is, ten out of eleven parts of all the time he lived on earth, he confined himself, in a great measure, to the duties of the humble station in which he was born.

All other plans of action are mere illusion. We deceive ourselves by aiming at shining exertions, if we neglect our natural and obvious obligations. That man adorns religion most effectually who meekly follows Providence, and steadily performs every duty in that condition of life which he has been appointed to fill. This is the true spirit of religion. This will sanctify every part of our behaviour, and enable us, each in his station, as members of an holy priesthood, 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.'

It is much to be regretted, that many well meaning and devout persons are too inattentive to the direction I have been endeavouring to recommend. They have taken
up

up a general idea, that their profession of religion will certainly expose them to the censure of the world. Under this impression, they abandon all concern to avoid it; and even reckon it a token in their own favour when they fall under reproach. But this is carrying the principle of indifference to the opinion of men to an excessive and dangerous length. The Apostle Peter states the proper conduct of Christians in this respect. He admits that they will be exposed to unjust reproach; but are they, on this account, to give up all regard to what men shall say of them? By no means. They are still to aim at removing their prejudices, by every proper attention. *‘Having your conversation,’* saith he, *‘honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may, by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.—For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men *.’*

IV.

* 1 Peter, ii. 12.—15.

IV. If you wish to exhibit the gospel to advantage in the eyes of men, beware of discovering a contentious or uncharitable spirit in your intercourses with them. Too many of those who make profession of religion seem to think that it has nothing to do with reforming the faults of the temper. They indulge themselves in a bitter censorious disposition, more allied to peevishness than either to virtue or religion. Their zeal performs wonders, when it seconds their propensity to 'variance, emulations, wrath, 'strife, envying;,' but is far from being so conspicuous in acts of benevolence, charity, or forbearance. Their conversation is gloomy, their countenances and manners forbidding. From such unfortunate examples, it is too often rashly concluded, that the nature of religion itself is harsh, melancholy, and severe.

Be it your study to give no occasion for so injurious a conclusion. 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, 'and evil-speaking, be put away from you,
O O 'and

‘ and be ye kind one to another, tender-
 ‘ hearted, forgiving one another, even as
 ‘ God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven
 ‘ you.’—‘ Walk worthy of the vocation
 ‘ wherewith ye are called, with all lowli-
 ‘ ness and meekness, with long-suffering,
 ‘ forbearing one another in love, endea-
 ‘ vouring to keep the unity of the spirit in
 ‘ the bond of peace. Do all things with-
 ‘ out murmurings and disputings, that ye
 ‘ may be blameless and harmless, the sons
 ‘ of God without rebuke in the midst of a
 ‘ crooked and perverse nation, among whom
 ‘ ye shine as lights in the world *.’

V. If you desire to exhibit the gospel
 to advantage in the eyes of men, shew that
 the comforts of it are even now a satisfying
 portion to your souls. The unthinking
 (by far the grearest) part of mankind, are
 determined in their judgment by mere out-
 ward appearance. If, to the Christian
 himself, it doth not yet fully appear ‘ what
 ‘ he

* Ephes. iv. 31. 32.; Ibid. 1.—3.; Philipp. ii. 14. 15.

'he shall be,' far less do his prospects seem so distinct and lively to the men of the world, as to balance in their minds the thought of being subject to present and perpetual dejection. Disgusted with the apprehension of a 'long and weeping night,' they think it would not even be compensated by the 'joy that is to come in the morning.' Would you then engage men to sell all, and buy the 'pearl of great price,' let it appear to their conviction that you are fully satisfied with your own purchase. Would you invite them to the 'land of promise,' show them the fruits that grow there. Would you lead them into the ways of wisdom, let them see that you have found them to be indeed 'ways of pleasantness and peace.'—'Rejoice in the Lord always.' Let the serenity of your countenance, and the cheerfulness of your conversation, manifest that you have received of the Lord Jesus that 'living water' which refreshes the scenes of existence,

ence, while they are passing on to the mature glory of the heavenly state.

Beware, at the same time, of deriving any part of your joys from the polluted sources of sensual pleasure. Is there not in your 'Father's house bread enough, and 'to spare?' Cultivate that delicacy of spirit which disdains to think it so much as *self-denial* to renounce the pleasures of sin. Aspire to be possessed of these sentiments of the Psalmist. 'There be many that say, 'who shall shew us any good? Lord, lift 'thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my 'heart more than in the time that their 'corn and their wine increased.'—Visit me 'with the joys of thy salvation; uphold 'me with thy free spirit. Then will I 'teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners 'shall be converted unto thee*.'

'Thus shall your light break forth as the

* Psalms, iv. 67.; Ibid. li. 12. 13.

' the morning, and your health shall spring
' forth speedily, and your righteousness
' shall go before you, and ye shall be called
' the repairers of the breach, the restorers
' of paths to dwell in.'

SERMON

S E R M O N XI.

ON THE BONDS OF UNION PECULIAR TO CHRISTIANS

EPHESIANS, IV. 2. 3.

—Forbearing one another in love ; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

THE behaviour of Christians one towards another is one of the most obvious marks by which the world is led to judge of the truth of their profession, and of the power of their religion. Nothing is more universally offensive, than the view of a society of men at constant variance
among

among themselves ; who have no forbearance towards their mutual mistakes in judgment, or infirmities of temper. This proud and irritable frame of mind is entirely contrary to the spirit of the gospel. This self-sufficiency, or pretended wisdom, ‘ descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For, where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work *.’

Hence the earnestness with which the Apostle intreats the Ephesians, in this passage, to give evidence of their being the disciples of Christ, by the contrary dispositions of humility and gentleness. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, — *forbearing one another in love ; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*

The text may be considered as laying down

* James, iii. 15. 16.

down the duty of Christians in the three following respects.

I. Of preserving, as far as possible, unity of religious belief.

II. Of maintaining brotherly love amidst those differences of religious opinion which cannot be prevented.

III. Of cultivating a peaceable conduct among themselves, not only amidst difference of opinions, but even amidst those other causes of offence to which their mutual infirmities may give rise.

These points of Christian duty I will endeavour to illustrate and recommend in the following discourse.

I. Christians ought to preserve, as far as possible, unity of religious belief. A complete agreement, in this respect, is indeed rather to be wished than to be expected, among men living on earth. The common imperfections of the human understanding, and the different characters of individual minds, forbid us to raise our hopes to this desirable, but unlikely prospect. The Sa-
cred

cred Scriptures, it is true, are in our hands, as a standard by which all controversies are to be decided. But one man interprets Scripture differently from another, and the controversy remains. In fact, divisions, with regard to many articles of belief, have taken place among the professors of Christianity, from the earliest age of the church. In the time of the Apostles, it was disputed whether the observance of the legal ceremonies was necessary to salvation, and whether the Gentile converts should be subjected to that observance. A council was held at Jerusalem to settle this controversy. The decision was unanimous, that the Gentiles should have no such burden laid on them *. Nevertheless, we find that the dispute remained, and even grew to schism. Hence arose the Sects of the *Nazarenes* and *Ebionites*, both of which asserted the necessity of observing the rites of Moses; The *Ebionites* holding this as

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* Acts, xv. 1.—30.

incumbent on all Christians ; the *Nazarenes*, as incumbent only on the believers of the Jewish nation.

What is to be done when similiar diversities of religious opinion arise among Christians ? Is the difference to be allowed to rankle, and degenerate into strife ? No ; —this is always hurtful to religion, always unbecoming in the disciples of the ‘ PRINCE ‘ of PEACE.’ But, how is it to be avoided ? Hear the words of the same Apostle, who gave the precept in the text. ‘ Let us ‘ therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus ‘ minded ; and if, in any thing, ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even ‘ this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we ‘ have already attained, let us walk by the ‘ same rule, let us mind the same thing*.’ Here we have the true maxim laid down for preserving, as far as possible, unity of religious belief. In certain great points all Christians are agreed. Let the consciousness

* Philipp. iii. 15, 16,

ness of this agreement allay the animosity of debate as to less essential topics. Let us hold fast the common undisputed articles of our faith in the only true God, in Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, and in the doctrine which is according to godliness; let us persevere in the acknowledged duties of our practice, and calmly wait until he who has the hearts of all men in his hands shall enlighten us perfectly in the knowledge, and unite us thoroughly in the profession of all truth. Such was the candid and edifying plan of conduct laid down by the great and zealous Apostle of the Gentiles. 'Whereto we have attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.' His own example affords an admirable illustration of it: 'Though I be free from all men, (saith he), yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews: To them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them
' that

‘that are under the law : To them that
‘are without law, as without law, (being
‘not without law to God, but under the
‘law to Christ), that I might gain them
‘that are without law. To the weak be-
‘came I as weak, that I might gain the
‘weak : I am made all things to all men,
‘that I might by all means save some *.’—

Nor let us suppose that these compliances on the part of the Apostle proceeded from mere easiness of temper, far less from an unprincipled versatility of mind. Never was any character less obnoxious than his was to this censure. When, for instance, the question was concerning the liberty of others; when it was proposed to subject the Gentile converts to the yoke of Jewish ceremonies, Paul, who, for the sake of edification, could waive the exercise of his own liberty, was inflexible in defending their’s. Hear his own account of his conduct in this matter.—‘But, when Peter was come
‘to

* 1 Corinth. ix. 19. 23.

‘ to Antioch, I withstood him to the face,
‘ because he was to be blained. For, be-
‘ fore that certain came from James, he did
‘ eat with the Gentiles ; but, when they
‘ were come, he withdrew, and separated
‘ himself, fearing them which were of the
‘ circumcision. And the other Jews dis-
‘ sembled likewise with him ; insomuch
‘ that Barnabas also was carried away with
‘ their dissimulation. But, when I saw that
‘ they walked not uprightly, according to
‘ the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter,
‘ before them all, If thou, being a Jew, li-
‘ vest after the manner of Gentiles, and
‘ not as do the Jews, why compellest thou
‘ the Gentiles to live as do the Jews ?’—
How beautiful, how noble, was this gene-
rous attention, on the part of Paul, to the
rights of conscience in other men ! It is
reckoned a considerable degree of candour
to allow the same indulgence to the preju-
dices of our brethren that we give to our
own. But, how much greater a degree of
it was that which Paul displayed, when, at
the

the same time that he made every personal compliance in things indifferent, and sacrificed all the innocent preferences of his own mind for the 'GOSPEL'S SAKE,' he was so anxious to guard the freedom of judgment in others?

These observations contribute to throw light on the precept in the text, as far as it relates to unity of religious belief among Christians. It does not exact a complete agreement as to every opinion which may be connected with the system of Christianity; but it enjoins them 'that are strong' 'to bear the infirmities of the weak, and 'not to please themselves*.' While it requires every man to be 'fully persuaded in 'his own mind,' it at the same time forbids us to judge or condemn others because of their difference in opinion, but rather to attend to this.—'that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his 'brother's way †.' It warns us against 'doting

* Romans, xv. i.

† Romans, xiv. 13.

‘doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings, of men of corrupt minds *.’ In a word, it requires of us, that, while we labour to remove the ignorance, and to confute the errors of our brethren, these endeavours be tainted with no contention or vain glory, but that we be ‘gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves †;’—thus *forbearing one another in love, and endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*’

II. Christians ought to maintain brotherly love amidst those differences of religious opinion which cannot be prevented. None of these should make them forget the indispensable obligation of this great and ‘ROYAL LAW.’ How trifling are all the causes of dissention that can occur, compared with the sacred and powerful bonds
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* 1 Timothy, vi. 5. 6.

† 2 Timothy, xi. 24. 25.

by which we are held together? Are we not all pilgrims and strangers on earth, travelling, with hasty steps, to the dwelling-place of our fathers? Why should we fall out by the way? How absurd do the animosities excited by the zeal and bigotry of particular denominations of Christians, appear when viewed in this light? How deplorable their eagerness to calumniate and injure each other, when it is considered that they must all so soon appear before their common Master, who will certainly dispense to them the same measures of rigour or lenity with which they have treated their brethren. Christianity is the Religion of Love. He that loveth not his brother, loveth not the God whom the gospel reveals;—he knows not the spirit of the religion he professes;—he is ignorant of one great end for which his Saviour died. ‘God is Love;’—‘the end of the commandment is charity;’—and Jesus became the propitiation for our sins, to teach us, that, ‘if God so loved us, we
ought

‘ought also to love one another *.’ What relation on earth is cemented by so many ties as that in which all who name the name of Christ stand one to another ? ‘There is one body, and one spirit, (says the Apostle, in the verses immediately following the text), even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.’—‘For, as the body is one, (saith he in another passage), and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body : So, by one Spirit, are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bound or free ; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit †.’—The chief sources of variance among worldly men, are their eager competitions for the same objects of interest, vanity, or ambition. They aspire

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* 1 Timothy, iv. 5. ; John, iv. 8.—11.

† 1 Corinth. xiii. 12. 13.

to certain honours or emoluments from which one successful candidate excludes all the rest. In the race of worldly ambition, all run, but one only gains the prize. But, of the Christian course, the reward is not so penurious. He who arrives first at the goal receives a prize, which lessens not those in store for them that follow. ‘In my Father’s house,’ said our Lord to his disciples, ‘are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you *.’—‘There is, indeed, one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: The stars also differ from one another in glory, and so shall it be at the resurrection of the dead †.’—But these different proportions of glory will involve no defect in the happiness of any individual whose name shall be found written in the ‘Lamb’s Book of Life.’ Every one shall have a portion large as his widest wish; every one shall have an honourable station: They

* John, xiv. 2.

† 1 Corinth. xv. 41. 42.

They shall all be 'kings and priests unto 'God,' and serve him in his temple day and night without ceasing.—Can there be any seeds of strife or hatred in such prospects as these? Ought not such a glorious union in views to heal every petty discord that now threatens to embroil us? How inconsistent with these views is the narrow illiberal spirit that would confine brotherly love within the small circle of those who think in all points as we do?—While, therefore, we hold fast, and earnestly contend for the great doctrines of salvation, by the merits of a crucified Redeemer, through faith manifested by good works, let not our tempers be soured against those who, holding the same fundamental truths, differ from us in smaller controversial articles. Let us converse with them, when occasion offers, rather on the subjects on which we are agreed, than on those in which we differ, and in which, through the frailty of human nature, our difference may degenerate into wrangling. Let us
join

join one hand with their's in brotherly love, and lift the other in token of our mutual consent in pronouncing the catholic benediction of the Apostle, ' Grace be with
' all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ
' in sincerity *.'

III. Christians ought to cultivate a peaceable conduct among themselves, not only amidst difference of opinion, but amidst those other causes of offence to which their mutual infirmities may give rise. It has already been acknowledged, that a complete agreement in every article of religious belief is not to be expected among men dwelling on earth. By those who know human nature, it will also be acknowledged, that even the warm brotherly love, which has been recommended under the former head, is not always to be expected in the degree that could be wished. ' Offences will come.' Occasions of jealousy and misunderstanding will sometimes occur,

* Ephes. vi. 24.

cur, which may have a tendency to cool that affection with which we ought to regard each other as brethren in Christ. This is indeed a deplorable supposition. Two sacred ties have been loosed. One only remains,—the BOND of PEACE. Let us beware of breaking this also. If, through any misunderstanding with a brother, our conversation with him cannot have all the pleasing warmth of unreserved confidence, let it at least be under the restraint of Christian courteousness. Let us at least avoid those occasions of open rupture, which must be equally destructive to the peace of our own minds, and to the credit of the gospel. If we are commanded to ‘honour all men *,’ i. e. never to forget the consideration due to human nature, even in the most abject and criminal circumstances in which it can appear: Surely much more ought we to honour all Christians;—to respect that worthy name by which they are called, so far

* 1 Peter, ii. 17.

far as to refrain from treating them, on the pretence of any provocation whatsoever, either with opprobrious language, or injurious behaviour. Hear with what earnestness this exhortation is addressed by the Apostle, in various passages of his Epistles, ‘ If there
‘ be therefore any consolation in Christ, if
‘ any comfort of love, if any fellowship of
‘ the spirit, if any bowels, and mercies ;
‘ fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded,
‘ having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done
‘ through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem each other
‘ better than themselves.’ — ‘ Put on, therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved,) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering ; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any : Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye *.’

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* Philipp. ii. 1. 3. ; Coloss. iii. 12, 13.

Having thus endeavoured to explain and recommend the exhortation in the text, let me now obtain your attention to a few directions for assisting you to comply with it.

FIRST, Beware of Prejudice and Bigotry. Weigh carefully the evidence on which you found your religious opinions. Have they been the result of a humble, attentive, and deliberate examination of Scripture? or have they been blindly adopted, upon the mere authority of men? These last generally render the person more headstrong and intolerant than such as are produced by a rational conviction. Perhaps you value yourselves on the soundness of your religious belief;—and God forbid that this should ever be thought or spoken lightly of by the ministers of religion. But still it is necessary to warn you, that mere soundness of belief will not save you from the wrath to come; nay, that, so far as it is only a speculative attainment, producing pride and uncharitableness, it will certainly aggravate the

the condemnation of those who boast of it. In this case, it is even more dangerous than ignorance. The ignorant may acquire instruction, by reading, hearing, and other ordinary means. But the dogmatical self-confident theorist is beyond the reach of these means. He reads only that he may be qualified to dispute ;—he hears only that he may shew his talents as a critic ;—he has respect of persons ;—he cannot profit by instruction, unless it be delivered by favourite teachers, or expressed in the precise phrases to which he is attached. When his taste is not suited in all these respects, he lothes instruction, and casts it behind his back — This is not religion, but spiritual pride and delusion. Be ye exhorted to beware of this abuse of knowledge, and to cultivate simplicity of mind. ‘ Lay-
‘ ing aside all malice, and all guile, and
‘ hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speak-
‘ ings, as new born babes desire the sin-
‘ cere milk of the word, that ye may grow
‘ thereby, and be edified together in love *.’

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* 1 Peter, ii. 1. 2. ; Ephes. iv. 16.

SECONDLY, Beware of arrogance. Let no imagined superiority of your own talents, knowledge, or virtue, render you harsh or impatient towards those whom you reckon below yourselves in these respects. Perhaps your self-estimation, in this comparison, may be erroneous. But, grant it to be just; still, condescension is the most honourable superiority which one human creature can display towards another. ‘We that are strong,’ saith the Apostle in another passage, ‘ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves*.’

THIRDLY, Cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance. Without this no society on earth can exist with comfort. The young need it from the aged, and the aged from the young;—the sick from the healthy, and the healthy from the sick;—the scholar from his teacher, and the teacher from his scholar: In a word, all characters and

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relations

* Romans, xv. i.

relations in human life require it one from another. Christianity enforces the study of this necessary virtue, in the most earnest terms. 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken
' in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore
' such an one in the spirit of meekness,
' considering thyself lest thou also be
' tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens,
' and so fulfil the law of Christ *.'

If, by this discipline of mind and temper, we be enabled to attain that gentleness which is inspired by the gospel, and was so eminently exemplified in its divine Author ; if our zeal and steadfastness in maintaining sound words, be tempered with charitable constructions as to the opinions, and benevolence towards the persons of those who differ from us ; if, in all cases of dispute, we follow after those
' things which make for peace, and where-
' with one may edify another : ' Our union as brethren in Christ will be as complete as
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* Galat. vi. 12.

the present imperfect state admits.—Thus shall we most effectually adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. Thus shall we manifest ourselves to the consciences of men, as the genuine disciples of Christ, for whom he offered this intercessory prayer, ‘that
‘they all may be one, as thou, Father, art
‘in me, and I in thee, that they also may
‘be one in us, that the world may believe
‘that thou hast sent me, and hast loved
‘them as thou hast loved me *.’

‘Now, the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus,
‘that ye may with one mind and one
‘mouth glorify God, even the Father of
‘our Lord Jesus Christ †.’

* John, xvii. 21.

† Romans, xv. 5. 6.

S E R M O N XII.

ON CANDOUR.

 MATTHEW, vii. 1. 2.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.

IMPERFECTION adheres to every thing with which we are conversant on earth. From this seeming defect in the natural constitution of things arises a great and important advantage in a moral view. Hence it becomes necessary for us to cultivate a peculiar

peculiar class of virtues, which could not otherwise be formed in our characters, in consequence of having no objects to which they referred. Were unmixed happiness, for instance, the present reward of obedience to the divine commandments, there could be no sphere of exercise for patience, fortitude, and resignation;—qualities so indispensibly necessary amidst the actual vicissitudes of life. In like manner, were our own characters, and those of our fellow creatures, perfect; were our hearts pure from corruption, and our understandings free from prejudice and error; mutual forbearance would be unnecessary; and there could be no ground for the prohibition in the text against passing judgment on the conduct of our brethren: But, as the case really stands, liable as we are to mistake the motives of action in other men, through ignorance, and prone to exaggerate their faults, through envy or resentment, caution in these respects becomes a virtue of the highest utility and importance.

Judge

'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.'

I will endeavour to ascertain the meaning and extent of the prohibition contained in these words, and to illustrate the reasons on which it is founded.

It cannot be supposed that it lays an *universal* restraint on our faculty of judgment, as it relates to the actions and characters of our fellow creatures. This would be inconsistent, both with our moral constitution as individuals, and with the constitution of civil society. The moral constitution of our nature leads us irresistibly to form an opinion of the merit or demerit of every action we see performed by rational beings. Such as are just, faithful, generous, pious, command our immediate approbation; while such as betray the contrary dispositions are regarded with disgust and abhorrence.

Beside these feelings which are inseparable from our moral constitution, there is

a natural right of judgment vested in parents, tutors, and guardians, by which they are entitled to admonish, reprove, and chasten those committed to their charge. In addition to both these, there is a public judgment competent to the society of which we are members, and by them delegated to magistrates and other officers, who pronounce and execute the sentence of the law against offenders.—The prohibition in the text has no reference to any of these. It neither supercedes our moral feelings of approbation or blame, the exercise of the natural judgment and authority committed to parents and guardians, nor the exercise of the public judgment vested in society. It is addressed to us, as the children of one common Parent, whose mercy towards all his offspring ought to repress every degree of wanton harshness in their treatment of each other. It reminds us that our exercise of judgment on the conduct of our fellow-creatures is bounded by the purposes it is designed to serve, in confirming our
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own moral sentiments, training to virtue those committed to our charge, and restraining the disorders in society ; but that, when carried beyond these limits, it becomes a daring encroachment on the prerogative of the Most High. In a word, it is designed to prevent those rash and injurious decisions on the actions and characters of our fellow men which are prompted by ignorance of human nature,—by ignorance of ourselves,—by a suspicious temper,—and by religious bigotry.

These four particulars seem to comprehend the chief sources of rash judgment on our brethren.

I. Ignorance of human nature often leads us to extend the decision we pass on particular actions to the general character of those who do them. This propensity operates, in some cases, to produce a disproportioned admiration ; in others, an excessive abhorrence of the actor. It is, however, the last only which comes properly under our consideration at present. A little attention

attention will show us how improper it is to give way to it.

The characters of all men are, to a certain degree, mixed; so that, to estimate them justly, we must weigh their good against their evil qualities. But the hasty judgment disdains this deliberative process; and, taking its own feelings of the guilt of a particular action as its only rule, sternly pronounces the person who has been capable of it to be destitute of every principle of virtue. A cruel and unjust decision, subversive of *charity*,—and contrary to *experience*.

It is not for us to pronounce that a fellow-creature is abandoned of all goodness, because he has committed a particular act even of gross and heinous wickedness. We know not all the circumstances in which it was done; we cannot compute the degree of ignorance or infirmity which at the fatal moment may have blinded or surprised him. In these respects, he is to be weighed in the balance of an higher Judge. At

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any rate, he is our neighbour, and we ought to 'love our neighbour as ourselves.' Let us apply this rule to the case we are considering. In what manner does self-love operate when we ourselves have committed a fault? Does it not lead us to look around on all hands for an excuse? Do we not, in such a case, expatiate on the power of passion, on the feebleness of reason, on the violence of the particular temptation by which we were overcome, and on the general blamelessness of our conduct, excepting the unhappy instance?—Has our neighbour no right to the same considerations to soften our censures of his crime? Shall our imagination, so busy to frame apologies for ourselves in similar circumstances, devise nothing in *his* favour? Shall we make no allowances for the force of temptation except when it is addressed to our *own* passions? Is not the offender a MAN, subject to like infirmities with ourselves,—a brother who has been 'overtaken in a fault, and whom

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'we ought to restore in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted *.'

These remonstrances of charity are seconded by the impartial voice of truth and reason. It is contrary to experience, that single acts, even of gross wickedness, infer a total depravity of character. Noah, Lot, Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, fell each of them into heinous sins: But who will dare to say that these men were destitute of all goodness?

Let me not, however, be supposed the advocate for that profligate mode of reasoning which would interpose the consideration of human weakness as a bar to our abhorrence of the foulest crimes that men can commit. God forbid that we, whose duty it is to confirm your moral feelings, should ever make the most distant approach to so pernicious a doctrine. No;—the charity which the gospel teaches lessens not our hatred of sin, but only mitigates

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* Galat. vi. 1.

our severity towards the sinner. It reminds us that, as there are blemishes in the best, so there may be something good found in the worst of characters. By this view of human nature, it teaches us to beware of pronouncing a fellow creature reprobate, on account of single acts of wickedness which he may have committed.

II. Ignorance of ourselves is often a source of harsh judgment on others. To this our Lord refers in the verses immediately following the text. 'Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or, how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite! first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.' Let us apply to ourselves this plain and beautiful exposition of our Saviour in all cases wherein we are led to judge harshly of a brother.

Suppose

Suppose him to have been betrayed, not merely into a single act of wickedness, but into a series of them, amounting to a habit. This case, it must be owned, is more unfavourable than the one considered under the former head : But, even here, we must beware of excessive severity in judging, 'lest we be judged.' Let us at least begin with examining, whether, if the secret iniquity of our own heart, and practice, were laid open, it would not be as odious and shameful as that against which our indignation rises. 'He that is without sin 'among you,' said our Lord, in the case of the adulterous woman, 'let him first 'cast a stone at her *.' Which of us will, upon these terms, be the executioner of judgment on our brethren ? Which of us is free from some vicious bias, some sin that does more easily beset us ? Perhaps this criminal propensity may never have broken forth into action. But, how many narrow escapes have all of us made from this inward enemy ? and how much of the

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* John, viii. 7.

comparative blamelessness of our conduct has been owing to circumstances altogether independent of ourselves ?—to the controul of Providence, to the arrangement of our outward lot, to a train of events, as contrary, perhaps, at the time, to our inclinations, as they afterwards proved favourable to our virtue. Let us call to remembrance, in this view, the various scenes through which we have passed, and reflect how fatally we must often have wandered, had not our way been hedged by Providence. Can we recollect no unguarded season, in which, if opportunity had coincided with criminal desire, our virtue must have yielded ? And ah ! how can we know whether, if we had been once entangled in the snares of a great transgression, we should have ever been able to recover the footsteps of virtue ?

There are sins to which a momentary temptation may impel, that involve consequences so ruinous, as to produce a powerful temptation to prevent them, by the commission

mission of other and greater crimes. If virgin chastity has been yielded to the arts of the seducer, there arises a temptation to blast or to destroy the fruit of the womb, that the guilt may be hid from the eyes of men. If the marriage-bed has been violated by an adulterous Monarch, the injured husband is put in the front of the battle, with the express design that he may be 'smitten and die *.'

Such is often the rapid progress of vice, 'when a man is drawn away of his lust and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death †.'

But, besides this dreadful connection between certain ruinous vices, and a train of subsequent guilt, there is another consideration, which candour should make us attend to in judging of our brethren who have been thus betrayed. They who have never incurred any heavy reproach from mankind have the advantage of being restrained

* 2 Samuel, xi. 15.

† James, i. 14. 15.

strained from open offences, by a regard to decency and reputation. But, when this salutary restraint is gone, the career of wickedness knows no bounds. Like a river which has overflown, not only its natural banks, but those mounds also which human labour had reared to stop its encroachments, it spreads far and wide without controul. There are sins, not more heinous in themselves than many which escape with little censure; sins too, the temptation to which may often be very strong, of which one overt act blasts the criminal for ever in the eyes of mankind. Thus degraded in the sight of men, the unfortunate victim of temptation sees no retreat, no refuge, but among the vicious; he goes on from evil to worse; and, excluded by the infamy with which he is loaded, from the hope of success in any creditable pursuit, he sinks into the dregs of sensuality, or madly rushes on the most daring enormities of conduct. If these considerations were duly weighed, they would abate much of that unrelenting

lenting severity with which we too often regard our abandoned fellow creatures. They would turn our feelings into a more becoming channel,—to the acknowledgment of that ‘mercy which has prevented *us*,’ and of that gracious hand which hath kept *us* from falling, while others have been cast down, never to rise again. Surely it would neither degrade the character, nor hurt the virtue, of those who have escaped the grosser pollutions of sin, to think, on the one hand, how little they can ascribe to their own caution; and, on the other, how quick the progress of sin is, when restraining grace is withdrawn, and the transgressor left to the lusts of his own heart.

If the consideration of our common nature, and of the narrow escapes from the snares of vice, which may be recollected by persons of the most blameless virtue, should thus soften our censures even of those who have gone far and fatally astray,—much more ought we,

III. To be on our guard against those malignant suspicions, as to the characters of men, which there is no evidence in their outward conduct to justify. There cannot be a stronger indication of our own depravity, than the disposition to suspect evil where none appears. Persons of this turn of mind may justly be supposed to derive it from reflection on their own crooked motives, and to impute to others the same obliquity of intention of which they are conscious in themselves.

A habit of suspicion is equally unfriendly to virtue—and to happiness. It is unfriendly to virtue, by restraining the sources of benevolence and compassion, by obstructing or dissolving friendship, above all, by destroying that warm admiration of excellence, which is often the best spur to the attainment of it. They whose hearts teach them always to depreciate the good qualities of those around them, to impute a mean or common motive to their best actions, and to construct, in the worst sense, those

those which seem dubious, can never be expected to aim, in their own conduct, at any thing which is lovely, 'or of good report.' Surely they cannot hope for that tribute of praise from their brethren, which no excellence of conduct can force from themselves; or, at least, if they do hope for it, they betray such a want of inward equity, as of itself vitiates their whole character. This, indeed, is the odious feature of an uncandid mind, that its exactions on others are as great, or greater, than what are made by those who render, in return, the most mild and charitable constructions. In the clearest cases, they have no credit to give to those considerations, with respect to their fellow creatures, by which they enhance the merit, or alleviate the blame, of their own conduct. Destitute of every feeling but a tender regard for themselves, not only sympathy, gratitude, and kind affections, have no place in their minds, but even justice itself is swallowed up in this universal selfishness.

A habit of excessive suspicion is no less unfriendly to happiness than to virtue. How miserable must that man be, whose mind is constantly haunted by the apprehension of universal depravity in all around him, who is a stranger to all the charities of life, who never dares to remit his vigilance and circumspection, not even with his friend, his child, or his brother. ‘To avoid, at this expence, (says a great moral writer), the mistakes to which candour is exposed, is it to acquire the discernment of character at too high a price, and to purchase safety in society with the loss of all that makes society valuable.’—How miserable would be the intercourse of human beings, if every one, thus living merely to himself, walked in the secret armour of suspicion? The countenance of a fellow creature, instead of being an invitation to amity and confidence, would be a signal for hostility or defence; and the local complaint of the Psalmist would then extend to all the earth; ‘Wo is me that I
‘sojourn

‘sojourn in Meshech, and dwell in the
‘tents of Kedar. My soul hath long
‘dwelt with them that hate peace *.’

Hitherto I have spoken of the actions,
the habits, and the motives, of men, as the
objects of rash judgments ; but I have now
to observe,

IV. That this improper disposition is of-
ten carried to a still greater length, so far
as to pass severe sentences on our fellow
creatures, merely on account of difference
in sentiment.

The importance of sound opinions, espe-
cially in matters of religion, is undeniable ;
and, whoever is deeply impressed with a
sense of this, will certainly be anxious to
diffuse the knowledge, and to promote the
reception of the truth, among his brethren
of mankind. But, whatever excites the
zeal of men for an object confessedly of
importance, is liable to become a handle
for other purposes, or a disguise for other
passions seemingly connected with it. This
observation has been strikingly verified in
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* Psalms, cxx. 5. 6.

the history of religion. The zeal of making converts to religious systems of belief has often unsheathed the sword, or kindled the flames of persecution; and men, who had no fault but that of differing from a human creed, have been imprisoned, tortured, and put to death, to advance the glory of God, who delights in mercy. The progress of sound learning, the milder manners of society, and, above all, the better knowledge of the Scriptures, have now happily banished, in a great measure, this detestable practice from the Christian world. But the zeal thus restrained from inflicting sanguinary punishments in this world has taken another course in the minds of the bigotted and uncharitable. With them it is now converted into a deliberate mental proscription of all who differ from them, not to temporal but to eternal flames. The word of God, which was given us to guide our feet into the ways of peace, has been made the engine of controversial warfare, and the occasion of the bitterest enmities.

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The professed followers of Him who, when he was 'reviled, reviled not again,' have mutually loaded one another with the most opprobrious appellations; and, while opposing parties have contended for the exclusive name of Christians, that badge of charity has been lost, by which the true disciples of Christ are most effectually distinguished.

To those who make this daring encroachment on the prerogative of the Most High, the text is addressed with a peculiar emphasis, '*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*'

Can it be supposed that Jesus, who has enjoined us 'to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us,' can it be supposed that HE has given us permission to think and speak contemptuously of all who do not agree with us in the same precise articles of belief? Can we have HIS authority in numbering all such among the outcasts

casts from his grace ?—A consideration, so likely to extinguish the affection, we ought to bear them as fellow creatures.—Is it thus we are to approve ourselves as the children of our ‘ Father in Heaven, who ‘ maketh his sun to shine on the evil and ‘ on the good, who sendeth his rain on the ‘ just and on the unjust * ?’ If we love them only who love us, who approve and adopt our system of tenets, what reward, what pretension to reward have we ? Do not the most profligate associations of men the same ? If we salute our brethren only, narrowing that term to those of the same persuasion in all points with ourselves, what do we more than the most selfish and uncharitable of the human race ? This is not the spirit of the gospel. This is not the ‘ wisdom which is from above, which ‘ is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and ‘ easy to be intreated, full of mercy, and ‘ of good fruits, without partiality, and
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* Matthew, v. 45.

without hypocrify * This is not the charity, which, excelling all other graces, shall endure for ever, which suffereth long, and is kind, which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. This wisdom is not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For, where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. Speak not evil, then, brethren, one of another. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law; but, if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy, Who art thou that judgest another †? Enter into your own hearts, ye rigid censors! Examine your own characters,

* James, iii. xvii.

† 1 Corinth. xiii. 4. 7.

‡ James, iii. 15.; Ibid. iv. 11. 12.

ters, ye who have no allowance to make for the failings of your brethren. Do ye pretend to be possessed of a virtue uniform and irreprehensible? Be assured nothing under this can justify your severity.—Nay, even this would not justify it. For, He who never did evil, who was ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, and ‘separate from sinners,’ has taught us, by his latest words on earth, to put the mildest constructions on the conduct of even the worst of men. He taught us this, when in the midst of torments which his enemies inflicted, he thus prayed, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’

— Luke, xiii. 34.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIII.

ON ALMS-GIVING.

2 CORINTHIANS, ix. 6. 7. 8.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.

IN the beginning of this Chapter, the Apostle explains to the Corinthians the reason for which he had sent Titus to prepare the bounty before hand which they designed

designed for the supply of their needy brethren. It was not that he had any doubts of their liberality, of which he had even made his boast to other churches, but only that their offering, being first duly proportioned to every man's ability, might be ready whenever they should be called on to make it. 'I know, (says he), at the 2d verse, the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago, and your zeal hath provoked (or stimulated) very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf, that, as I said, ye may be ready.'

My feelings at present resemble those of the Apostle with respect to the Corinthians *: I know the forwardness of your minds as to every benevolent purpose towards

* Preached at the desire of the Managers of the Charity-Workhouse in Canongate, on the Lord's day preceding the annual collection for the benefit of that institution.

wards which your assistance is required. Nevertheless, as the the time draws nigh when your extraordinary bounty has been usually solicited for the support of the Charity Workhouse in this place, I have judged it might be seasonable to offer a few observations from the passage I have read, in order to stir up your minds, by way of remembrance, that, as the Apostle says of the Corinthians, 'ye may be ready.'

The text naturally divides itself into three propositions.

I. That, in the final issue of things, a proportionate compensation is provided for the degrees of liberality with which men contribute to the relief of their indigent brethren. *'This I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.'*

II. That the value of our bounty in the sight of God depends on the spirit and intention with which it is given. *'Every man, according as he purposeth in his heart,*

heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.

III. That there is reason to trust in Providence that our real interests shall in no respect suffer in consequence of obeying the calls of charity. *God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.* These propositions I will endeavour to illustrate and confirm in the following discourse.

I. The text instructs us, that, in the final issue of things, a proportionate compensation is provided for the degrees of liberality with which men contribute to the relief of their indigent brethren. *This, I say, he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*

The time given to mortals to prepare for eternity, is often compared in Scripture to the season in which we cast the seed into the ground, the produce of which we are

to reap in harvest. 'Be not deceived,' saith the Apostle to the Galatians, 'God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not *.' Amidst the seeming confusion of present events, a great design, hid from the eyes of mortals, is gradually advancing to its completion. A register is kept on high of all human actions; a tribunal is prepared, before which all must stand to receive their doom: And, when the books shall be opened, on which judgment is to proceed, the most conspicuous record will display, as its title, the DUTIES OF HUMANITY.

'When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him,

* Galat. vi. 7. 9.

‘ him, then shall he sit upon the throne of
‘ his glory. And before him shall be ga-
‘ thered all nations; and he shall separate
‘ them one from another, as a shepherd di-
‘ videth his sheep from the goats. And he
‘ shall set the sheep on his right hand, but
‘ the goats on the left. Then shall the
‘ King say unto them on his right hand,
‘ Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit
‘ the kingdom prepared for you from the
‘ foundation of the world. For I was an
‘ hungred, and ye gave me meat, I was
‘ thirsty, and ye gave me drink, I was a
‘ stranger and ye took me in. Naked, and
‘ ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited
‘ me: I was in prison, and ye came unto
‘ me. Then shall the righteous answer
‘ him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an
‘ hungred and fed thee? or thirsty and
‘ gave thee drink? When saw we thee a
‘ stranger, and took thee in? or naked,
‘ and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee
‘ sick or in prison, and came unto thee?
‘ And the King shall answer, and say unto
‘ them,

‘ them, Verily, I say unto you, in as much
‘ as ye have done it unto one of the least
‘ of these my brethren, ye have done it un-
‘ to me. Then shall he say also unto them
‘ on the left hand, Depart from me, ye
‘ cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for
‘ the Devil and his angels. For I was an
‘ hungred and ye gave me no meat: I was
‘ thirsty and ye gave me no drink: I was
‘ a stranger and ye took me not in: Na-
‘ ked, and ye clothed me not: Sick, and
‘ in prison, and ye visited me not. Then
‘ shall they also answer him, saying, Lord,
‘ when saw we thee an hungred, or a-thirst,
‘ or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in
‘ prison, and did not minister unto thee?
‘ Then shall he answer them, saying, Ve-
‘ rily, I say unto you, in as much as ye did
‘ it not to one of the least of these, ye did
‘ it not to me. And these shall go away
‘ into everlasting punishment; but the
‘ righteous into life eternal *.’

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* Matthew, xxv. 31. &c.

Ye Christians profess to believe every circumstance in this solemn description. What think ye, then, of the duties of HUMANITY? What think ye of the Religion of which they make no part ;—the Religion of the hard-hearted ! What will it avail him ? Where will he appear in the day of judgment ?—in the day of judgment,—when the distinctions which the fashion of this world has introduced among men shall have passed away, and when new sources of honour or disgrace shall draw the attention of the universe ? Lazarus shall not then be abashed in the presence of the nobles of the earth. But they shall be abashed and confounded for ever who see the beggar, whom once they spurned from their door, now caressed by saints, guarded by angels, and honoured of God himself ; and even they shall be abashed, whose stinted beneficence did not correspond with the means afforded them by Providence, who observed the winds and the clouds with too
much

much caution to sow the seeds of a plentiful harvest.

But who are they that shine in robes of light, whom the King of heaven delights to honour, and whom all the spirits of glory applaud and congratulate? These are they, who, in a world of promiscuous distribution, perceived and accorded with the hidden plan of Providence. These are they who obeyed the divine influence, which, in the form of *PITY*, lessens the sufferings inseparable from a state of trial. These are they who have 'known the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he 'was rich, yet, for our sakes, became poor, 'that we, through his poverty, might be 'rich.' Like him they have gone about doing good, they have dispersed abroad, they have given to the poor. Therefore are they now clothed in white raiment, and their names published with applause before the Father, and his angels. God honours his own image, and has placed them high in the kingdom of heaven.

What

What think ye, Christians, of this prospect? Is there here no motive to the labours and sacrifices of love? Is it a small matter that, in the harvest, at the end of time, the bounty with which you sowed shall be recompensed with such a distinction as the Father of glory can proportion to the degrees of resemblance to his own image? 'Whosoever,' said our Lord, 'shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily he shall not lose his reward.' Think of all the degrees of beneficence that may be exerted above this simple gift, and of the field which thus opens to holy ambition. 'There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. One star also differeth from another in glory: So also shall it be at the resurrection of the dead. *He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*'

II. The text instructs us, that the value of our bounty, in the sight of God, depends on the spirit and intention with which it is given. *‘Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.’*

Among those who bestow outwardly in charity, there are still found wide differences in respect to the dispositions here referred to by the Apostle. Some there are, whom a cold and selfish temper, or the dregs of a worldly spirit, restrain in their acts of charity. They acknowledge the obligations to beneficence, but are unconscious of the ardours of the truly bountiful. They compute, with solicitude, how much their benefactions take from their store of worldly goods; and nothing can ever raise them above a regard to this consideration. There are others, in whom a liberal and generous spirit prevails. With their sense of duty is joined an *‘unction from the Holy one,’* an ingenuous and fervent disposition,

sition, which, when the season and occasion prompt to acts of beneficence, rises above earthly solitudes. God, who seeth the heart, values our benefactions chiefly by this standard. In his sight, that is often mean and hateful which is highly esteemed among men; and the costly oblations which dazzle our eyes, are of less value than the smallest offering made with 'simplicity of heart.' Above all, he loves a cheerful giver. He even loves and approves the good intention, though it should never be carried into effect. It is written in his book, and will be found there in the day of final accounts, with this sentence over against it, 'It was well that it was in 'thine heart.' When the poor and needy can only put up a supplication for him that is more destitute than himself, 'He 'that keepeth the soul knows it, and He 'that pondereth the heart' shall declare it with applause, in the day when every secret thing shall be revealed. Let not the poor, therefore, lament their situation, as
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if it utterly excluded them from the praise and reward of the bountiful. 'If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not *.' When our Lord 'saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury, he cast his eyes also upon a poor widow putting in her two mites. And he said, of a truth, I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. For all these have of their abundance cast in to the offerings of God; but she, of her penury, hath cast in all the living that she had †.'

To you who can bestow in greater abundance, this part of the subject suggests the propriety of self-examination. It is, indeed, of no consequence to those who are to partake of your bounty what may have been the motives that inspired it. They are bound, and not only they, but all who see the outward act of liberality,

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* 2 Corinth. viii. 12.

† Luke xxi. 1. &c.

to ascribe it to a laudable intention. But, if it be asked, what the persons themselves ought to think of their seeming generosity? the word of God obliges me to speak differently. There we are taught to take no credit from outward acts of goodness, but to examine cautiously whether our motives be sound, even in the most costly deeds of liberality which it is possible for us to perform: 'Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing *.' Examine your motives, then, and try them faithfully, as in the sight of God. Beware of vain-glory. 'Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. But, when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth, that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father, which

* 1 Corinth. xiii. 3.

* which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly *.' Beware of superstition, as well as of vain glory. Think not that your offering will be a compensation for the omission of other duties, far less an atonement for your secret sins. In this, as in every other duty, let the omniscience of God be present to your thoughts. 'Let him that giveth, give with simplicity,—not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.'

III. The text instructs us, that there is reason to trust in Providence that our real interests shall in no respect suffer, by obeying the calls of charity. 'God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.' Although, in this world, there be not a visible arrangement of Providence to guard the prosperity of good men, or to reward the services they render to the wretched,

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* Matthew, vi. 1. &c.

there is yet a hidden influence, which secures their dwelling, and their food in the land. Their ‘bread, which they have cast ‘upon the waters, shall be found after many days *.’ ‘He that hath pity on the ‘poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that ‘which he hath given he will pay him a- ‘gain †.’ Even in the present course of events, a certain degree of reward is provided for this work and labour of love. ‘A ‘good name,’ saith the wise man, ‘is rather to be chosen than great riches, and ‘loving favour rather than silver and ‘gold ‡.’ And what is there that procures this blessing so certainly as the character of beneficence? The charitable man is beloved and honoured by all who know him. ‘When he goes out to the gate, and prepares his seat in the street, the young and ‘the old meet him with reverence, the ear ‘that heareth him blesteth him, and the ‘eye that sees him gives witness to him :
‘ Because

* Eccles. xi. 1.

† Proverbs, xix. 17.

‡ Ibid. xxii. 1.

‘ Because he delivered the poor that cried,
‘ and the fatherless, and him that had none
‘ to help him *.’ When calamity over-
takes him, he is soothed with the voice of
universal sympathy. In his sickness the
land mourns; and, when he dies, the in-
heritance of his good name descends to his
offspring a source of blessing and prospe-
rity, a spur to virtue and excellence. ‘ I
‘ have been young,’ saith David, ‘ and
‘ now am old, yet have I not seen the
‘ righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging
‘ bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth,
‘ and his seed is blessed *.’—‘ If thou draw
‘ out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy
‘ the afflicted soul; if thou bring the poor
‘ that are cast out in into thy house, when
‘ thou seest the naked, if thou cover him,
‘ and hide not thyself from thine own
‘ flesh; then shall thy light rise in obscu-
‘ rity, and thy darkness be as the noon-
‘ day. And the Lord shall guide thee con-
‘ tinually,

* Job, xxix. 7. &c.

† Psalms, xxxvii. 25. 26.

‘tinually, and satisfy thy soul in drought,
‘and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt
‘be like a watered garden, and like a
‘spring of water whose waters fail not *.’

Have we not seen these promises fulfilled to the bountiful, and to their seed after them? Have not they had their adversity comforted by those whom they or their fathers comforted in adversity? Yes;—the selfish, the hard hearted, the oppressor, may sink into unpitied distress; nay, the stern, indignant joy may arise at his downfall. But it is not so with the righteous, who hath shewn mercy, and given to the poor: ‘Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand †.’ God will raise him up friends, who shall ‘bemoan him and comfort him,’ and rejoice in doing him good. He has ‘given a portion to seven, yea and to eight;’ and from them, or from their seed, he shall find a refuge when

* Isaiah, lviii. 10. 11.

† Psalms, xxxvii. 24.

when evil cometh on the earth. It may be a faithful servant whom he cherished in his house, while it was yet the habitation of plenty; it may be a friendless orphan whom he has educated; it may be a debtor whom he has relieved from prison, and enabled again to earn the wages of industry; it may be one or other of his acquaintance before, who did eat bread with him in his house, into whose heart God shall put it to seek out the retreat of his poverty, and comfort him with the sweet benefactions of gratitude.—Many such things are with our God, ‘who is excellent in counsel,’ and *able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*

But, in truth, there is no occasion, at present, for stating the supposition so strongly as I have done. There is little danger of our worldly circumstances being much impaired by the sacrifices which charity requires. The gospel lays no unreasonable burden

burden on us in this respect. It enjoins only, that, according as 'God has prospered us, we lay by in store,' for distributing to the necessities of the poor. Has God then prospered us in our lawful callings? Has he blessed our basket and our store? Are our houses safe from fear? and does the work of our hand succeed in that to which we apply it? Have we been rejoicing with our friends in the usual festivity of this season *? And shall we not take some thought of those who have no interest, either in the busy or festive scenes of life, who have no home but what we have provided for them, no basket but what we fill, no friends on earth but ourselves?

I conclude with stating in a few words the nature of the charitable institution to which your benefactions are solicited: and I begin with what I consider to be its most important use, that of instructing poor children in the principles of religion and virtue.

* Preached on the last Sunday of the year 1789.

tue. The importance of this object, in general, none will controvert. Suppose, then, the least favourable effect which the institution can have in this view. Suppose it to amount only to this, that they are taught to repeat the answers in our catechisms, to give an account of what they hear at church, and to say their prayers morning and evening to God. Is not this better than to be taught nothing at all? Is it not far better than to be taught the lessons and the language of vice?—But it cannot be true that the instructions they receive have no farther good effects; for God has promised his blessing upon early discipline. ‘Train up a child in the way that he should go, and, when he is old, he will not depart from it*.’ In fact, it is not true; for the children thus educated turn out well on the whole; of which the best proof that can be given is, that they are sought after as apprentices and servants.

For,

* Proverbs, xxii. 6.

For, whatever men's own opinions or practice may be, they always wish that their servants may have good principles, both of religion and virtue.

This institution is likewise a refuge for the old and destitute. I mean not to enter into any argument as to the comparative charge to the public, of maintaining them on this or on any other plan. To the community they must be a charge, in one way or another; and, if both the education of poor children, and the maintenance of the aged and infirm, can be accomplished under one establishment; if the wretched habits of intemperance, and the loathsome abodes of want, are thus exchanged for regularity, cleanliness, and comfort, what benevolent mind would enter into a solicitous computation of the cost? Hear then, again, the words of the Apostle: *'But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth*
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‘ in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.’

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SERMON

364 10
S E R M O N XIV.

ON THE VALUE OF A GOOD NAME.

PROVERBS, xxii. 1.

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.

TO those whose affections are placed entirely on the objects of this world, many of Solomon's observations must have the appearance of paradox, if not of contradiction. Such persons will not easily enter into his sentiments, when he declares his preference of sorrow to laughter,

ter, of the house of mourning to the house of feasting, and of the day of one's death to the day of his birth. These maxims, indeed, are only true in a religious sense. Put another world out of the question, and they cease to be entitled to our assent. Had we nothing to consider beyond present interest or enjoyment, that man would be an unwise, as well as an unpleasant adviser, who should bid us forego any pleasure that contributed to sweeten the passing scenes of existence. 'A man could have no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry, all the days of his life which God giveth him, for it is his portion *.' But the case is different with regard to the observation in the text. Set aside every religious view, let no regard be had to the prospects of the world to come, it will still remain true, that 'a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.'

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* Eccles. vii. 18 ; and viii. 15.

I will endeavour to confirm this proposition by some arguments, and to apply the subject in a practical improvement.

I. The advantages of wealth are common to the good and to the bad. As merit does not always procure, neither does demerit always forfeit them. It is observed by Solomon, in another passage of his writings, that 'no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them, because all things come alike to all, one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; To him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not *.' If, indeed, there be any difference, as to outward advantage, between the good and the bad, the balance seems rather to be in favour of the latter, for which appearance, so far as it takes place, this reason may be assigned, that bad men, having no restraint from

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I * Ecclef. ix. 2.

conscience, devote themselves wholly to their worldly pursuits. Behold! these are the ungodly, saith the Psalmist, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches; they are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Their eyes stand out with fat; they have more than their heart could wish *.—If we review the history of past ages, we shall see that many individuals, of the most flagitious character, have possessed the most envied advantages of fortune. If we attend to the uniform state of society, after the distinctions of wealth have got footing in it, we shall find that some of the meanest vices contribute, in a high degree, to the acquisition of them. Are there any quicker steps in the ascent towards worldly greatness, than flattery, meanness, versatility, and impudence? What patronage is in general more certain and powerful than that which is obtained by ministering

* Psalms, lxxiii. 12.

ministering to vanity and vice? How slow a
 progress does unbending virtue make to-
 wards the advantages of fortune, compared
 with the rapid success of time-serving quali-
 fications?—Such is the promiscuous distri-
 bution of worldly prosperity. A *good name*
 on the contrary, is a peculiar blessing. Even
 in the most corrupt state of society, it is not
 to be obtained without at least the appear-
 ance of goodness. Where there is no sem-
 blance of *virtue*, there will be no *praise*;
 where there is nothing *lovely*, there will be
 no *good report*. The lustre of great abili-
 ties, and the glare of ambitious qualities,
 may for a time dazzle the eyes of man-
 kind; but nothing, except integrity, can
 procure that solid species of reputation
 which gives a man the lasting esteem and
 confidence of his fellow-creatures. The
 silent, but sincere respect, attending true
 goodness, far outweighs the undistinguish-
 ing applause bestowed on the ambi-
 tious and great. ‘The memory of the just
 ‘is blessed, but the name of the wicked
 ‘shall

'shall not *.' Would not every wise man, then, prefer so peculiar and distinguishing a blessing to those promiscuous advantages which imply no real excellence in the persons possessed of them?

II. Other worldly advantages are, in point of real enjoyment, inferior to that of a *good name*.

This point of the comparison may be appealed, with the utmost confidence, both to the reason and to the feelings of men. Where is that person to be found, who, in the calm view of what is most important to his interest and happiness in society, does not prefer his character to every other worldly consideration? His reason must tell him, that no gain can possibly balance the loss of character; that no pleasure, worthy of being so called, can be enjoyed without it. His feelings must inform him, that human nature loaths and spurns at solitary joys. Some countenance of our fellow-

* Proverbs, x. 7.

low-creatures, some social sentiments, are necessary to give a relish to the highest enjoyments of sense. Who would perfume himself, with the most precious ointment only to enjoy his own fragrance in solitude? or who envies the retired Voluptuary, when he sits down in gloomy pomp, friendless, and alone, to the splendid luxuries of his table?

Against these natural feelings it is in vain to strive. No man ever gave up the care of his *good name*, whether from vice, indolence, or pride, who found a compensation for it in the materials of private luxury. In vain does he vary and compound them, so as to gratify every sense. In vain he feeds his self-sufficient thoughts, contemplates his retired joys, and forbids the approach of every intrusive eye. This unnatural plan of happiness cannot succeed. An unceasing monitor upbraids him inwardly. Discontent steals gradually on his mind; and a sullen dejection sits on his countenance. The thought of the deserved

ved contempt in which he is held, embitters all his joys. At length, but alas ! too late, he sees the ruinous error of his life. Spleen and melancholy take possession of his soul. ' His riches are corrupted, his garments are moth-eaten, his gold and silver are cankered, and the rust of them is a witness against him, and eateth his flesh as it were fire *.'

There is probably no situation in human life so thoroughly miserable as that of the man who has thus excluded himself from all the pleasures connected with reputation. In the midst of society, he lives in dreary solitude. He is avoided like a person infected with plague or leprosy. At last, existence itself becomes a burden to him, and he is tempted to seek refuge in the last, irreparable act of human rashness. It may be observed, accordingly, that we are disposed to speak in terms of compassion of those who

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* James, v. 23.

have abandoned the care of their good name. The *Hypocrite* who has deceived us is abhorred, without the mixture of another affection ; but the man who has renounced reputation is viewed with some pity, mingled with our abhorrence. We consider him to be already wretched, and we commiserate at the same time that we despise him. The utmost meanness of worldly condition appears a more enviable lot than the summit of worldly greatness, thus exposed to the contempt and reproach of all around.

III. A good name is preferable to every other worldly advantage, on account of its superior influence, and ascendancy over the minds of men. The world is, in a great measure, governed by opinion ; and all the great achievements of men have owed their success to the proper management of this engine of power. It is very possible for two persons to pursue the same design, by the same means, with equal ability and diligence, and yet with very different,

ferent, nay with opposite success, owing to the unequal estimation in which they are held. History is full of such examples; and daily observation presents them in abundance. A good name smooths the chief obstacles in the way of arduous and useful enterprise. It gives weight to our opinions, authority to our counsels, and even acceptance to our reproofs. It overawes or conciliates, restrains or stimulates, the minds of men, as the occasion may happen to require. It enables the legislator to enact laws with the general consent of the governed; and it enables the magistrate to carry them into effect through the community. It enables the orator to persuade in the senate, and the general to lead forth his troops to victory in the field of battle. It enables the judge to distribute law and equity to the satisfaction of contending parties; and it enables private men, by the confidence reposed in their judgment, greatly to supersede, in the place where they dwell, the expence and delay of the law.

law. In a word, it enables every man, in his particular calling, to prosecute the objects of it with pleasure and success. Compared with this extensive influence of a good name, all other worldly advantages must appear limited and inconsiderable. Riches may indeed procure friends, or, at least, assistants to our plans of action, among those to whom we distribute them. 'Every man,' saith Solomon, 'is a friend to him that giveth gifts *.' But he who giveth greater gifts will soon undermine the friendship which rests only on this foundation. The dependence on mercenary minds has been always found unfure and dangerous. While your liberality continues, they are your's for any purpose you are pleased to command; but, should it cease, or be rivalled, they desert you for ever. The influence arising from a good name, on the contrary, is steady and certain. The friends procured by it are faithful and constant:

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* Proverbs, xix. 6.

They serve our cause without cost or grudge. The favour obtained by it is freely and cordially bestowed. It inspires a person with a generous and manly confidence, with open and honourable sentiments, and with all that gracefulness and dignity of conduct, which give weight and advantage to a good cause. Even the reputation obtained by one eminently useful action has been found sufficient to counteract the most powerful influence from an opposite and hostile quarter. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the book of Esther. Haman and Mordecai lived together in the court of the King of Persia, and were competitors for his royal favour. Haman had all the advantages which are derived from an artful, and designing turn of mind. He had also the advantage of flattering the avarice of his Monarch, by the prospect of treasure, which he laid before him, on complying with his counsel of destroying the Jews. Mordecai was a man of unassuming virtue and integrity. He
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had performed a great service to the King by revealing a conspiracy which had been formed against his life. But, satisfied with doing his duty, he had claimed no reward for it. In the mean time, Haman was promoted to the highest honours in the kingdom; and all who beheld him, excepting Mordecai, bowed, and did reverence before him. He alone withheld this mark of deference and submission. Such were the respective situations of these two men, when Haman, already possessed of power, and of all that credit which the misplaced confidence of his Sovereign gave him, sought to destroy Mordecai, with his whole nation, for refusing to do homage to his greatness. What was there to prevent the execution of his purpose? The King's consent had been obtained, and his ring, as the pledge of it, was delivered into the hands of Haman.—‘The Lord bringeth the counsel of the Heathen to nought; he maketh the devices of the people of none

* none effect *.' Mordecai's good service to his Prince, though not blazoned by himself, was nevertheless recorded in the Chronicles of the kingdom. By the good Providence of God, it was brought, during a sleepless night, to the remembrance of the King, and instantly turned the scale against his enemy. Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for his rival.—Mordecai was advanced to the highest honours which his sovereign could bestow †.

IV. A *good name* is preferable to all other worldly advantages, because the benefits derived from it are at once more *extensive*, and more *permanent*.—The influence of riches is necessarily limited, or else soon exhausted. No degree of opulence can satisfy the cravings of mercenary minds. Neither riches, nor power, can constrain opinion, or secure that hearty and faithful attachment on which a man can depend in all circumstances. But a good name ex-

* Psalms, xxxiii. 10.

† Esther passim.

tends as far as men have intercourse with each other, and carries its advantages wherever it goes. It recommends the person who enjoys it to men of all parties and distinctions. It makes him a citizen of the world, and introduces him, with acceptance, to all good men in every part of the globe. The selfish and covetous labour to secure themselves against the vicissitudes of fortune, by hoarding up riches. But a good name affords a far more extensive and effectual shelter in the evil day. He who enjoys it can never want the sympathy and assistance of his brethren when he falls into distress. Every one hastens to relieve his wants, to support his credit, and to comfort his anxieties.—A good name is also a more *permanent* blessing than any worldly advantage.—Riches often fall to our share without our merit, and often leave us without our fault. At any rate, if *they* leave us not, the time approaches when *we* must certainly leave them. ‘The rich man’ also dies, and is buried.’ All that they
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can procure him, then, is a monument among the great, with an inscription, perhaps, of hireling praise, from which the better informed passenger turns away with a virtuous indignation. But a good name is a lasting treasure. Seldom, without our own fault, does it leave us through life;—at the hour of death it is a comfort. To those whom we leave behind us it is a valuable inheritance. It excites our offspring to virtue, and procures them the friendship and patronage of good men. Many, whose stations in life are now high and respectable, can look back to the good name of a father as the source of that protection and assistance which conducted them to affluence and honour. Many, on the other hand, have had reason to curse their succession to great treasures of gold, as the source of those temptations which led them into the depths of guilt and misery.

On all these accounts, 'a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.'

You will observe, however, that the comparison is restricted entirely to such worldly advantages as gold and silver can purchase. For there is a blessing which the world can neither give nor take away, as much superior in value to a good name, as *it* is superior to all the advantages we have considered. The blessing I mean is a *good conscience*, the well grounded testimony of our own minds, ‘that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world *.’ On this steady foundation must our good name be reared. From this solid and intrinsic excellence the lustre of our character must be derived. For, even in our just and honest solicitude, with respect to this greatest worldly blessing we must still speak and act, ‘not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth the heart.’

Having thus endeavoured to illustrate the

* 2 Corinth. i. 12.

the proposition in the text, I proceed, as was proposed, to apply the subject in a practical improvement.

FIRST, Let me expostulate with those who wantonly throw away the advantage of a good name. But, are there indeed any, it may be asked, who can be supposed guilty of such extravagant folly? Yes, there are persons originally not destitute of good and amiable qualities, who, by a perverted plan of conduct, conceal every thing that is praise-worthy in their character, and are at pains to render themselves noted for the very contrary vices. Such persons, so far from wishing to appear better than they are, affect rather to be thought worse. They fancy a kind of glory to consist in pre-eminence in vice. To attain this glory, they overcome the repugnance of their own minds, and strive to load their conscience and reputation with crimes to which they are under no temptation. A character so totally perverted might be thought to be the painting of fancy, did not

not daily observation present it to our view. It is, however, a fact, that there are persons who thus 'glory in their 'shame,' who claim a merit in having cast off those restraints and scruples which have an influence on the sober part of mankind. Young persons, in the first enjoyment of liberty from the yoke of parents and tutors, are sometimes betrayed, by bad company, and by the levity of their own minds, into this vicious and absurd affectation. They boast of their feats of riot and intemperance. They profess principles still more libertine than their practice. Not satisfied with provoking the censure of mankind, by their disorderly and licentious conduct, they strive to fill up what is wanting in the profligacy of their actions by the unprincipled and shocking strain of their discourse. They talk lightly of crimes which they have not the boldness to commit. In a word, by a strange perversion, they become hypocrites in vice, and are at pains to convince the world to what a wretched degree they

they are abandoned. It is certain that such persons could not take a shorter or a more effectual way to become in fact as reprobate as they wish to appear. Among the many restraints which God has laid on the practice of vice, a regard to character and decency is none of the least considerable. When this is entirely thrown off, the career of wickedness finds nothing to resist its progress towards complete depravity. Thus, the sinner's efforts to corrupt himself are sometimes followed with all the success he could wish. His aversion to vice is totally overcome; his dread of its most flagitious excesses vanishes for ever. This, however, may not always happen. Some remains of conscience, some seeds of a good education, may perhaps prevent the success of these attempts to arrive at utter profligacy. Let us suppose this to be the case, and that he is brought to a sense of his guilt and folly, with what anguish must he then recollect the violence he did to his own mind in striving to obtain the character

character of a libertine? How must he regret the unhappy example he has shewn to others, and the bad impression he must have left of himself in the estimation of the wife and good? How must the bitterness of his repentance be aggravated by reflecting that the best future example he can display will hardly compensate, even to society, for the past scandals and offences of his life? What dreadful apprehension must he feel in considering those awful denunciations? ‘Wo unto that man by whom, offences come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea *.’—‘Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust,

* Luke xvii. 1. 2.

'dust, because they have cast away the law
' of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the
' word of the Holy one of Israel *.'

Let those who are setting out in life, then, beware of wantonly throwing away the advantages connected with a good name. Let them beware of adopting extravagant opinions, or hazardous plans of action, in defiance of the common reason and prudence of mankind. Let them beware of that false emulation which courts to be distinguished at all events, were it even by the excess of vice and folly. Youth, indeed, has many advantages, which may conceal, or at least palliate, certain defects in conduct. The levity and rashness of that season of life are willingly pardoned, and soon forgotten. But remember that even youth can furnish no excuse for the deliberate contempt of character. If the young have any hopes of acting a proper part in life, they must begin with endeavouring

* Isaiah, v. 20. and 24.

vouring to gain esteem. If they expect ever to be distinguished to advantage, they must settle this maxim in their minds, that a blameless conduct, though it may not raise them so quickly to notice, will in the end procure them that respect which nothing else can.

SECONDLY, Let me expostulate with those who, though not wantonly, yet, through carelessness and inadvertence, throw away the advantage of a good name. Satisfied with acting according to their own apprehensions of things, they neglect keeping measures with the opinion of the world; they indulge themselves in questionable liberties; they are careless about removing those prejudices which may happen to be formed against them:—In a word, they are much less anxious about their own reputation, than their sense of justice and humanity would lead them to be about those of their brethren. This is a character which falls under our daily observation. It does not, like the former, excite our thorough censure

censure or aversion. Of such persons we talk rather with pity than with abhorrence; and very commonly say, with justice, that they are their own greatest enemies. Now, though it be certain that this carelessness of temper may consist with many amiable dispositions, and with a faithful sense of duty as to the important obligations of life, yet it is far from being so slight a failing as those who are guilty of it are apt to suppose. It is a haughty and absurd thing to affect indifference to the opinions which our fellow creatures form of us. The degree of estimation in which he is held can never be a trifling consideration to a man of benevolence and active virtue. 'A good name,' saith Solomon, in another passage, 'is better than precious ointment.' But, 'as dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour, so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour *.' It

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* Eccles. vii. 1. ; Ibid. x. 1.

ought to be considered that, in order to be useful, we must be esteemed. He, then, who is careless of his good name, has in effect renounced the noble ambition of doing good ;—and for what ?—For a proud, and very questionable satisfaction, in his own opinion of himself. ‘ He has no desire for those things that are lovely, or of good report.’ He has nothing generous or aspiring in him. He prefers the stagnant repose of indolence to all the pleasure he might enjoy, and to all the good he might accomplish, by being both acceptable to God, and approved of men.—Let it also be considered that it may not be presumed by any man that his self-approbation will be always uniform. While the gaiety of youth, and the confidence inspired by prosperity, last, this self-sufficiency may swell the mind. But there are seasons in the life of every man, in which the heart reviews its own follies with severity, when it is as eager to condemn, as formerly it was to vindicate, our conduct. Such a season

son is often introduced to us by adversity or sickness. It will then be no small aggravation to other uneasy feelings, to find that the opinion of the world has long anticipated, and now re-echoes the censures of our own conscience. It is too much, when, to the inward bitterness of the heart, is added the gall of universal outward reproach.

THIRDLY, Let me remind you that all the observations which have been made on the value of a *good name* apply to that of our brethren, as well as to our own. Let this teach us, not only to beware of inventing or propagating the tale of slander ourselves, but even of giving ear to it when reported by others. Let our marked displeasure be ever shewn against the backbiter, tale-bearer, and whisperer, whose delight consists in depreciating the virtues, and in aggravating the failings of their fellow-creatures. And, when we are necessarily called on to consider accusations which affect the good name of another, let us go about it with the same caution, the same solemnity,

ty, and the same leaning towards the side of mercy, as if his life were in our hands.

To conclude : Let us endeavour to fix in our minds a just estimate of the blessings that are most valuable and worthy of being desired. Let not our eyes be dazzled by the shining advantages of wealth, as if they alone were the sources of happiness. Let us never sacrifice our reputation, far less our conscience, to the pursuit of riches. While it is our great concern to approve ourselves to God, who trieth the heart, let us also cultivate whatever is ornamental to real integrity, whatever can extend our influence in promoting the cause of truth and goodness. ‘ Finally, ‘ brethren, whatsoever things are true, ‘ whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever ‘ things are just, whatsoever things are pure, ‘ whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever ‘ things are of good report ; if there be any ‘ virtue, and if there be any praise : Think ‘ on these things, and do them, and the ‘ God of peace shall be with you.’

SERMON

S E R M O N XV.

ON UNFAITHFULNESS TO CONSCIENCE.

1 JOHN, iii. 20.

For, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

AMONG the various false appearances by which men are betrayed into vice, there is perhaps none that has a more extensive influence than the tranquillity of mind seemingly enjoyed by many habitual sinners. We have been impressed by early admonition

admonition with a belief that the guilty mind is a torment to itself; that there is no peace to the wicked; that they are like the troubled sea, whose waters cannot rest. In coming abroad into life, we are struck with a very different appearance from what we looked for in this respect. There is often no visible gloom or perturbation on the countenances of the ungodly. While they walk without controul 'in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes,' they seem equally satisfied with their present enjoyments, and fearless of any consequences in time to come.

Hence arises a temptation to doubt whether sin be indeed so evil a thing as we have been taught, when men, deeply polluted with it, are seen living so much at peace with their own minds. What can the testimony of a good conscience bestow beyond what seems to be enjoyed by these careless transgressors? Why should not we also taste the forbidden fruit, since, so far from being noxious, as we have been told,

told, it seems rather to inspire vigour, liberty, and joy?

To such as are tempted to reason in this manner, it may be of use that we investigate the true state of the case with regard to the appearance in question. Is it a real tranquillity that sinners enjoy amidst the career of wickedness? Or is it, on the contrary, forced and pretended, in opposition to the nature of things, and to their own feelings? If the last can be shewn to be generally, if not always the case, the young and unexperienced will thereby be undeceived as to one false appearance, by which they are often betrayed into paths that lead to destruction.

In order to throw light on this inquiry, I propose to illustrate the two following propositions.

I. That it is impossible to persist in the habits of known sin, and, at the same time, to escape the condemnation of our hearts, without forcibly suppressing convictions and feelings inseparable from our nature.

II.

II. That it is equally inconsistent with the fair verdict of our hearts, when, in consequence of the difficulty of this attempt, we resort to apologies for our vices, taken from the prevailing maxims and manners of the world.

After I have confirmed these propositions, I will conclude with a practical application of the subject, founded on the solemn warning in the text. *'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.'*

I. It is impossible to persist in habits of known sin, and, at the same time, to escape the condemnation of our hearts, without forcibly suppressing convictions and feelings inseparable from our nature.

I proceed on the supposition that there is in the human mind a certain faculty, which reviews and pronounces sentence on the various parts of our conduct, and that the operations of this faculty are intimately connected with our happiness, as moral and reasonable creatures. Taking this for granted,

ed, I observe, that, were the law of God the mere arbitrary injunction of a Superior, our offences against it might escape the censure of this moral faculty. The only principle of obedience, in that case, would be the dread of punishment. This, in fact, is the only principle of the religious systems which *Superstition* has devised. In these, the lawgiver is clothed with cruel and forbidding attributes; and the obedience he is supposed to require is often frivolous, oppressive, and even immoral, in its nature. But we speak not of these unhappy wanderings of the human mind, which separate the authority of conscience from the precepts and sanctions of religion. 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind *.' The Scriptures of truth afford us a clear revelation of his character and will. There we are led to view him, not as a harsh taskmaster, but as an affectionate parent, who propounds to us the obedience

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* 2 Timothy, i. 7.

of his laws as a reasonable and profitable service. He even challenges us to state what objections we can possibly have to any requisition which they contain. 'Hear ye, O mountains! the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy, which he will plead with his people. O my people! what have I done unto thee? wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me *.' Are we ready, then, to join issue with our Lawgiver in this pleading? Let us prepare the charge, and fill our mouth with arguments. To one of two tribunals we must resort to state them; — to *reason*, as a judge of the equity, or to *experience*, as a test of the expediency of his laws. Is it, then, unreasonable, that creatures totally dependent on God for their being, and infinitely indebted to him for the comforts of their being, should acknowledge their situation, by sentiments of humility and gratitude? Is it unrea-
sonable

* Micah, vi. 2. 3. 1.

sonable that social beings should 'do justly
'and love mercy?' Is it unreasonable that
creatures possessing the noble powers of un-
derstanding should respect the superior part
of their nature, and prefer the enjoyments
of the mind to the low and perishing plea-
sures of the body?

If the argument stand thus with respect
to the *reasonableness* of the divine law, let
us go next to *experience*, and inquire what
it testifies with regard to its expediency.
Many indeed have sought happiness in a
course of violating its precepts. But has
the gratification of their forbidden appe-
tites brought with it that enjoyment they
expected? Has their health been more
firm, their reputations more unsullied, their
fortunes more advanced, by this plan of
life? Nay, is not the very reverse the
case? Is not this the certain road to dis-
ease, and infamy, and ruin?—Here, then,
is a testimony in favour of the divine law,
at once striking and constant. There is
not a day that passes without shewing in-
stances

stances of the inseparable connection between vice and misery. There is so much slavery and distraction in obeying our disorderly passions, the consequences of them are in general so inconvenient and dangerous, that, in spite of the bias they produce in our judgment, we must soon perceive the folly of such a plan of life. Conscience becomes an irksome reprover, when it has lost its authority as a guide, and succeeds effectually in rendering those unhappy whom it fails to render virtuous.

I am aware it may be alledged as an objection, in point of fact, against the argument which has now been stated, that there are instances of persons who seem entirely at peace with themselves amidst continued habits of wickedness. But this objection will not appear to have much weight, when it is examined with attention. It is well known that there are men so destitute of self-controul as to hazard, for the most trifling considerations, all their hopes of success and credit in the present world. For
 them

them it is also no uncommon thing to seem perfectly easy and unconcerned, while inevitable ruin stares them in the face. But surely it would be a rash inference, that there is no principle of self-love, and no capacity of foresight in human nature, because some men rush so eagerly and blindly to their own ruin. A more probable account may be given of both these appearances. The mind of man possesses a power of averting its attention from circumstances that create uneasiness to it. This power, like all others with which our natures are endowed, may be strengthened by habit. The man whose reflections, either on his character, or on his circumstances, are painful to him, having frequent occasions to practise this art, naturally improves in the facility of doing it; and at last finds it easier to suppress his disagreeable thoughts than to take any measures for removing the cause of them. This objection, then, being so far set aside, it remains certain that there is in every man's breast a monitor, which
enforceth

enforceth the precepts, and in some measure anticipates the sanctions of the divine law. If men, notwithstanding these restraints of their own nature, persist in the ways of iniquity, it is not that their hearts do not condemn them, but that, in spite of this self-condemnation, they are still 'fully 'set in them to do evil.'

Does it not confirm this reasoning, that we see so many of those who have incurred the reproaches of their own minds plunging themselves into habitual intemperance? Does not this shew that the remonstrances of reason and conscience are beyond endurance, without unnatural and pernicious resources? To escape, for a time, from the anguish of self-reproach, they 'tarry long at the wine,' they abuse and stupify themselves, even in solitary excess. How deplorable a picture of human nature do such instances exhibit? How solemn a warning against disregarding the voice of reason and conscience? Is there an idea so dreadful to the imagination, as that of

a human being thus devoting himself to ruin?—A human being, without a resource but that of banishing thought at the expence of losing hope for ever!—In vain, then, does the libertine tell us that *Nature* (in his sense of the word) is the only law, and that to gratify all the propensities of *Nature* can never be criminal. This is the disingenuous plea of a depraved understanding, to vindicate the excesses of corrupted appetites. It is a language belied by his most intimate experience. These very appetites, languid and satiated with perpetual indulgence, instruct him that the paths of sensuality are a deviation from *Nature*. In the midst of riot his heart is sorrowful; and pangs of bitter regret mingle with all his joys.—Thus, it appears that it is impossible to continue in the habits of known sin, and, at the same time, to escape the condemnation of our hearts, without forcibly suppressing convictions and feelings inseparable from our nature.

II. I observed that it is equally inconsistent with the fair verdict of our hearts, when, in consequence of the difficulty of this attempt, we resort to apologies for our vices, founded on the prevailing maxims and manners of the world. It is a common language held by people of licentious practice, that the strictness of the divine precepts is to be lowered, in their actual application, to a sense conformable to the habits of the society with which we live. Great things are said of the power and prerogatives of *fashion*. They who have to converse with mankind, we are told, must accommodate themselves to their notions and practices, and must form their moral systems on the large and liberal basis of approved custom. Speaking of their own conduct, such persons will readily allow that it is far from coming up to the strict precepts of religion:—They are sorry for the defect so frankly acknowledged;—but they are no less frank in declaring that they cannot propose to themselves so strange

a thing as to grow singular by a thorough reformation. It would give them pain to be thought guilty of any great crimes; but it would give them almost equal pain, were they supposed to aim at such a purity of manners as would cast reproach on those with whom they associate. This, I say, is the language of many who have a respectable estimation in the present state of society, and whose example, of course, is readily pled as an authority by those who are setting out in life.

It were easy to shew how unsound and dangerous such maxims are. But I waive this argument, from the persuasion of being able to demonstrate that no man can entertain them in good earnest. They may be retailed as a fashionable mode of speaking; but it is impossible to avoid the consciousness of their thorough repugnance to common sense.—Let us only inquire, for a moment, what idea can be formed of a law enacted by the authority of a powerful, wise, and good being, which, at the same

time, is not to be strictly binding on his creatures.

You allow that the law of God prescribes a rule of life, some parts of which do not accord with your natural inclinations. You do not profess to throw off all reverence for that law; but you seem to expect that the sanctions with which it is guarded shall not be executed, merely for this reason, that the prevailing manners of the world discredit that degree of strictness which it requires. Now, I ask, whether it is your reason that suggests this conclusion? or whether it be not a mere libertine manner of speaking, to which your judgment gives the lie?

Suppose such maxims were delivered in a serious manner by a teacher of religion;—suppose one of your stated instructors should tell you from this place, without reserve, that the laws of God are indeed strict as they appear in his word, but that you need not be alarmed at this, because he has left the interpretation of them to be settled

settled according to the varying manners of mankind ;—suppose that, like the unjust steward mentioned in our Lord's parable, we should presume thus to compound your debts to the Almighty, and, instead of four-score, bid you set down only fifty ;—in other words, should it be told you, in this serious manner, that all the self-denial and purity which the gospel requires are words that have no meaning, or such a meaning only as you choose to affix to them ;—How would you esteem such doctrine ? I may venture to say that (however acceptable it might be to their secret wishes) the most licentious among us would condemn such pernicious instruction, and despise the unfaithful teacher who should deliver it. Does not this demonstrate that our understandings do not approve of these apologies for our vices, and that our evil habits stand condemned by the impartial verdict of our own hearts, no less than by the law of God ?

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The application of what has been said is clearly pointed out in the text : ‘ *If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*’

This, my brethren, is a very serious thought, and may serve to give us some idea of the awful solemnity which shall mark the day of final accounts.

That solemnity will not arise, more from the outward circumstances which shall attend it, than from the conscious feelings of those who shall stand before the dread tribunal. If an awakened conscience can, in this life, fill the sinner with unconceivable terrors ; if, even in good men, its feelings can produce a sorrow and anguish beyond the suffering of all outward evils ; if these things take place, although recollection fail as to many criminal transactions, and self-love cover many gross defects, what must be the case, when HE who entirely knows the heart and life shall lay them open to ourselves, and to the universe. To the final bar, before which all the children of Adam must

must appear, no external witnesses will need to be summoned. No more will be necessary than to confront our conviction with our practice, our just remorse with our vicious habits, that so 'every mouth 'may be stopped, and all the world become 'guilty before God.' We shall then be obliged to bear witness against ourselves, that we knew the truth, and yet retained it in unrighteousness; that we felt the vexations of the world, and yet remained attached to its vain pursuits; that we dreaded the judgments of God, and yet affected to disbelieve them; in fine, that we saw the excellence of virtue, even when we sought all our pleasures in vice.

It were earnestly to be wished that those who plead the general manners of the world, in vindication of their own licentious habits, would reflect whether this apology will be sustained in the day of judgment. 'Ye who now follow the multitude to do evil,' say, will that multitude either hide you from the view, or
shelter

shelter you from the wrath of the Almighty Being whom you have offended? The countenance of your fellow creatures may now embolden you in the ways of iniquity; riot and frantic mirth may hush up the feelings of remorse; but, where will these resources be, when conscience, awakened by the dawn of an everlasting day, shall vindicate its long abused rights? By what arts will you then be able to silence or set aside its verdict? How will you curle those fatal delusions which you cherished, and vainly regret the precious season of grace which you have let pass for ever! O then be persuaded, ere it be too late, to relinquish those false maxims which must betray you into endless misery. Attend with fairness and candour to the admonitions of conscience. With-hold your ear from the sophistry of passion, and from the deceitful arguments of worldly men. Allow yourselves in no prevarication with your hearts. Suffer them to pronounce an honest sentence;

tence ; and, although that sentence should upbraid you with many heinous offences, yet the very self-reproach thereby occasioned will give you an advantage for salvation beyond what you have ever yet possessed. The great danger to which all of us are exposed arises from judging too favourably of ourselves, and from indulging a deceitful security upon false principles. Even in the revelation of God's grace to sinners, no comforts are provided for the careless and self-confident. On the contrary, the original plan, and the pervading spirit of all its doctrines and institutions, is to discriminate the self-righteous from the humble, and to offer its blessings and consolations to the latter only. ' Thus saith
' the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in
' the high and holy place, with him also
' that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to
' revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one *.'—

' But

* Isaiah, lvii. 15.

‘ But wo unto them,’ saith God, ‘ that are
 ‘ wise in their own eyes, and prudent in
 ‘ their own sight, that say, peace, peace,
 ‘ when there is no peace. Therefore they
 ‘ shall fall among them that fall; at the
 ‘ time that I visit they shall be cast down,
 ‘ saith the Lord *.’—‘ Come unto me,’
 saith the Saviour, ‘ all ye that labour and
 ‘ are heavy laden, and I will give you rest †.’
 —‘ But they that are whole have no need
 ‘ of the physician. I came not to call the
 ‘ righteous but sinners to repentance ‡.’

* Jeremiah, vi. 14. 15.

† Matthew, xi. 28.

‡ Mark, ii. 17.

SERMON

S E R M O N XVI.

ON OUR IMPERFECT CONCEPTIONS OF
THE THOUGHTS AND WAYS OF GOD.

ISAIAH, IV. 8.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, saith the
Lord.*

THERE are many subjects, in reasoning on which *analogy* is our only guide to that knowledge which it is possible to attain. When such subjects are merely *speculative*, the errors to which this mode of reasoning often leads are comparatively of small importance. But the case is different when these errors affect the

great principles of religious belief. It cannot be a matter of small importance, whether the ideas we form of the Supreme Being be just, or erroneous; whether we rashly assimilate the object of our worship to the standard of our own imperfect conceptions, or adopt, as the rule of our belief, the revelation which he has condescended to give us of his own nature and perfections. The great object, indeed, of that revelation is to correct the errors to which our reasoning faculties are liable in this respect, and to establish the character of God on his own testimony, illustrated by a series of facts, the import of which is obvious to men of all capacities. ‘No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him *.’

I propose to illustrate the proposition in the text,

FIRST,

* John, i. 18.

FIRST, By stating a few instances, in which we ought chiefly to beware of ascribing the thoughts and ways of men to the Supreme Ruler of the world.

SECONDLY, By representing some dangerous mistakes which actually prevail in consequence of not attending to this important caution.—I will then conclude with a practical application of the subject.

I begin with stating a few instances in which we ought chiefly to beware of ascribing the thoughts and ways of men to the Supreme Ruler of the world: And, that the observations on this extensive subject may be brought within some compass, I will confine them to the following points, The nature and destination of man,—The evil of sin,—The way of extending mercy to sinners,—The means of carrying on the plans of Providence and grace,—The progress of these plans towards their final completion.

I. We ought to beware of ascribing to God our own limited and rash conceptions
with

with regard to the nature and destination of man. Two opinions on this subject, as opposite the one to the other, as both of them are remote from the truth, here solicit our notice.—On the one hand, if the conduct of men be admitted, in any degree, as an interpreter of their thoughts, we must conclude that many of the human race consider themselves as having been made for no higher purpose than merely to waste the bounty of Providence in a course of gratifying their inferior passions. Engaged solely in making ‘provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof,’ they seem to think that they have no higher part to act, as creatures possessing reason and conscience, than the lower animals act by mere instinct and appetite. In the language of the Apostle Paul, ‘their god is their belly, their glory is in their shame; and they mind only earthly things *.’—It is surely almost unnecessary to prove that these low and degrading

* Philipp. iii. 19.

degrading thoughts of human nature, cannot accord with the thoughts of the great Creator concerning his rational workmanship.—When God had made ‘man in his own image, when he had given him dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth on the face of the earth,’ was it his intention that this glorious resemblance should be defaced by vice and passion—that this dominion should be abused to the purposes of selfish and criminal indulgence? When ‘God saw every thing that he had made, and that all was very good *,’ was it in his view that MAN, the chief of his works on earth, should be comprehended in this approbation, however he might debase his nature by sloth or sensuality?

It may perhaps be said that this reasoning cannot be admitted;—that human nature is actually degraded;—and, consequently,

♥ Genesis, i. 28.—31.

quently, that no argument taken from its original condition is now to be regarded. Hence the sensualist boldly pretends that he acts conformably to his nature in gratifying all the demands of appetite and passion. But this apology for his criminal indulgences is as false as it is impious. The nature of man, degraded as it is by the fall of our first parents, is still a moral constitution, in which reason and conscience are manifestly intended to control all particular propensities *. Nay, the same Scriptures which inform us of this degradation of human nature do in fact declare that conscience is still the supreme faculty in it. For, 'When the Gentiles, which have not
' the law, do by nature the things contain-
' ed in the law, these, (saith the Apostle),
' having not the law, are a law unto them-
' selves, which shew the work of the law
' written in their hearts; their conscience
' also bearing witness, and their thoughts
' the

* See the former Sermon.

'the mean while accusing or else excusing
'one another *.'—But, while we avoid as-
cribing to God those views of human na-
ture under which the sensual and profligate
part of mankind seek to shelter their crimes,
let us also beware of pleading his authority
for the opposite error,—of thinking too
highly of it. According to this system,
man has been represented as a being so high
and dignified as to be sufficient for his own
direction, and master, in a great degree, of
his own destiny. Great things have been
said of the extent of his moral and intellec-
tual powers. His own reason and self-
command have been reckoned sufficient
guides to wisdom, virtue, and happiness.

As the former error is the result of gro-
velling and vicious affections, this, on the o-
ther hand, is the offspring of pride and false
philosophy. Widely different from both is
the idea we are taught by the Scriptures to
entertain of the nature and destination of
man.

* Romans, ii. 14. 15.

man. There we are informed that God made him at first in his own image, capable of contemplating the Creator, and his works ; that he endowed him with the sense of good and evil ; and formed him for exalted, divine, and everlasting pleasures. This was the original dignity of man, and his destination was suitable thereto. From a life of innocent enjoyment and easy obedience in the earthly paradise, we have reason to believe that his Maker would have translated him, in due time, to a state of higher bliss in his own immediate presence. But this original dignity of man has, through the abuse of his freedom, become the source of his disgrace and misery. The crown has fallen from his head ; his nature is polluted ; his moral and intellectual powers are weakened and debased. From this disorder and corruption of his nature, what but the most dubious or gloomy presages could he have formed of his future destination, had not his Maker revealed to him the counsels of his sovereign grace,
and

and unsearchable wisdom ?—‘ had he
‘ not made known the mystery of his
‘ will, according to his good pleasure,
‘ which he hath purposed in himself :
‘ That, in the dispensation of the fullness
‘ of times, he might gather together in one
‘ all things in Christ, even in him in whom
‘ we also have obtained an inheritance, that
‘ we should be to the praise of his glory *.’

Here we see the very misery and corruption of man contributing to shew the importance of his nature and destination. The counsels of heaven have been employed in favour of our fallen species. ‘ God
‘ so loved the world, that he gave his only
‘ begotten Son, that whosoever believeth
‘ in him should not perish, but have everlasting life †.’ The Son of God became man, submitted to sorrow and infirmity, died a painful, ignominious death ; the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Father and the Son, concurs in the gracious
3 G plan,

* Ephes. i. 9.—12.

† John, iii. 16.

plan, and dispenses the blessings purchased by the Redeemer. In a word, all the persons of the Godhead are manifested; and the united glory of every divine attribute displayed, in the method by which human nature is restored to purity, happiness, and glory. Let this view of the thoughts and ways of God toward the human race teach us our real state and prospects, what we originally were, what we now are, and how we may attain the chief end of our being.

II. We ought to beware of ascribing to God those slight ideas of the evil of sin, which too often find admission into our minds. The illustration of this head follows, as a natural consequence, from the observations which have already been made. The disordered state of any system is most conspicuous in the eyes of Him who is best acquainted with its nature, and with the purposes it is designed to serve. If, therefore, God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, with regard to the nature and destination
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of man, it is evident that his thoughts of sin, which is the disease and perversion of our nature, must be different from our's in the same proportion. Of no subject, indeed, are we so incompetent judges. Every one of the human race comes into the world tainted with an original corruption of nature; and the disordered affections proceeding from this polluted source have generally produced habits of vice, long before reason has acquired influence as a controlling principle. Hence arises a desire to persuade ourselves that the sins to which we are chiefly addicted have but a slight degree of guilt, that they will be winked at, or entirely overlooked, in the divine government. On this supposition, however ill founded, it is manifest that a great part of mankind rest all their hopes of safety in the world to come.

These notions seem to take their rise from a secret *inclination* to believe that the plan of divine government, which we see going on in the present time, shall be continued

tinued without much difference : In other words, that the long-suffering of God, in this state allotted for the probation of moral agents, may be considered as an argument against the punishments of the world to come. Thus, ‘ because sentence
 ‘ against an evil work is not executed
 ‘ speedily, therefore the heart of the sons
 ‘ of men is fully set on them to do evil *.’ But, what saith God himself to those who flatter themselves with such presumptuous hopes ? ‘ These things hast thou done,
 ‘ and I kept silence : Thou thoughtest that
 ‘ I was altogether such an one as thyself :
 ‘ But I will reprove thee, and set them in
 ‘ order before thine eyes †.’ Ignorant of the system of God’s government, and blind to the disorders which sin introduces into his works, *we* may think it a small matter to transgress his laws, and, through confused notions of his goodness, utterly inconsistent with his other attributes, imagine that sin may pass unpunished under a perfect

* Eccles. viii. 11.

† Psalms, l. 21.

fect administration. But, do we think that the Scripture speaketh in vain, when it testifieth of God in such words as these?—

‘He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.’—‘Evil cannot dwell with him, nor the foolish stand in his sight *.’—‘Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints ; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight : How much more abominable and filthy, then, is man, which drinketh iniquity like water † ?’

These solemn declarations are confirmed by remarkable facts in the history of the world. The expulsion of our first parents from Eden,—the deluge of the ancient world,—the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, loudly proclaim the pernicious nature and heinous demerit of sin. We feel it to be hurtful in the natural evils of pain, and sickness, and death, to which it has subjected us. But a view of it, infinitely more dreadful still, is exhibited in the sufferings
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* Habakk. i. 13. ; Psalms, v. 4. † Job, xv. 15. 16.

of our blessed Redeemer,—that everlasting monument of the purity of the divine nature, and of the inflexible majesty of his laws.—While, however, we take these views of the demerit of sin, we must, at the same time, beware,

III. Of ascribing to God our narrow thoughts with regard to the mercy with which he receives the penitent. To this view of the subject, the connection of the text leads our chief attention. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon *. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.*’

Without adopting that view of human nature which represents it as altogether selfish, we may still assert that men are prompted to acts of compassion by feelings which

* Isaiah, lv. 7.

which in themselves imply an imperfection of their nature. The misery of others affects us chiefly in consequence of imagining ourselves in their situation. When we are unable to view the case in this light, our compassion is either altogether obstructed, or greatly diminished in its influence.—Besides, this affection is seldom much excited, unless the object have some amiable qualities; and almost in no instance when the person suffers in consequence of wrongs or indignities done to ourselves. Even in those cases where no such obstructions have occurred, what have been the highest instances of this affection among men? History has recorded some remarkable examples of friendship. The strength of this attachment has been known to surmount the natural love of life. Let such instances have their full share of admiration. Still, the love of God to the human race exceeds them, as far as the ‘heavens are higher than the earth.’ —‘For herein God commendeth his love

‘to us, in that, while we were yet sinners,
 ‘Christ died for us *.’ In vain do we look
 into ourselves, and appretiate our own good
 qualities, with a view to discover the mo-
 tives of this distinguishing goodness shewn
 us by our Maker. We had abandoned the
 station in which he originally placed us,
 insolently affected a state of independence,
 questioned his veracity, and dared his pow-
 er. Justly, then, might he have left us to
 reap the bitter fruits of our apostacy and
 rebellion. But, behold and admire the
 triumph of sovereign compassion! ‘God,
 ‘who is rich in mercy, for his great love
 ‘wherewith he loved us, even when we
 ‘were dead in sins, hath quickened us, to-
 ‘gether with Christ, (by grace we are fa-
 ‘ved), and hath raised us up together, and
 ‘made us sit together in heavenly places
 ‘in Christ Jesus. That, in the ages to
 ‘come, he might shew the exceeding riches
 ‘of his grace in his kindness towards us †.’

Nor

* Romans, v. 8.

† Ephes. ii. 4-7.

Nor is it the unworthiness of the objects which alone heightens this instance of the divine compassion. It appears still more astonishing, still more unlike to the *thoughts and ways of men*, when we consider the person who was employed to accomplish our redemption. Had our Maker commissioned one of the lowest in rank among those ministering spirits who surround his throne, to bring us some relief in our wretched condition, even this would have been an act of unmerited grace and condescension. But, who is it that hath 'come in the name of the Lord to 'save us?' It is Jesus, the SON OF GOD, who from eternity possessed the essential glory of divinity, by whom, and for whom, all things were made. 'In *this* was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten 'Son into the world, that we might live 'through him *.' This is the marvellous record, from which we are led to conclude

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* 1 John, iv. 9.

with the Apostle John, not merely that the divine nature is disposed to benevolence, not merely that compassion is an attribute by which he is distinguished, but that the sum of his nature and perfections is expressed in these emphatical words, 'God is LOVE *.'

IV. We ought to beware of ascribing to God our thoughts with respect to the fitness of the means for accomplishing the plans of his providence and grace.

The Almighty Creator does not act with that parade of instruments which serves to magnify or embellish the little operations of men. When a world is to be made, he does not summon the innumerable ministers that do his pleasure, to assist in rearing the stupendous fabric. 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth.'—'God said, let there be light, and there was light.'—'He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.'

* 1 John, iv. 8.

‘fast *.’ When a world is to be redeemed, to whom is the mighty achievement intrusted?—Not to a messenger clothed in celestial pomp, but ‘to a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;’—‘the reproach of men, and the despised of the people.’

Who that had beheld an infant, born in an inn, and had traced his subsequent history through scenes of poverty, reproach, and persecution, until at last he saw it closed in an ignominious death, could have imagined (judging on human views) that this was the ‘wisdom and power of God’ unto the salvation of a whole race of intelligent beings? Yet, such were the means by which it pleased God to accomplish this plan of sovereign goodness. While Judas was providing for his covetousness, while the Jews were gratifying their malice, a superior influence over-ruled their passions, an unseen hand directed the event.

* Psalms, xxxiii. 6.—9. ; Genesis, i. 3.

event. 'The Lord bringeth the counsel of
 'the heathen to nought; he maketh the
 'devices of the people of none effect.'—
 'Because the foolishness of God is wiser
 'than men, and the weakness of God is
 'stronger than men. And God hath cho-
 'sen the foolish things of the world to
 'confound the wise; and God hath cho-
 'sen the weak things of the world to con-
 'found the things which are mighty; and
 'base things of the world, and things
 'which are despised, hath God chosen,
 'yea, and things which are not, to bring
 'to nought things that are *.'

V. We ought to beware of supposing a-
 ny embarrassment in the divine counsels or
 administration, on account of the slow or
 seemingly obstructed progress of the plans
 of providence and grace. We see only a
 few separate, and, as it were, disjointed
 parts of the great system going forward;
 and, though we may be persuaded, in
 general,

* Psalms, xxxiii. 10.; 1 Corinth. 25.—28.

general, that all things are conducted on a plan of wisdom and beneficence, yet many perplexing facts occur, to shake our reliance on this comfortable truth. The final issues of the divine government are remote, and hidden from our view. Ages on ages have passed; Empires have arisen and decayed; but the train of events seems still promiscuous, and the end appears not yet. Hence the objection of the scoffers, (of whom the Apostle Peter speaks), 'who shall come in the last days, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation *.'

Against these and the like temptations to unbelief, or anxious doubt, let us fortify our minds by the 'remembrance of the years of the right hand of the Most High.' The progress of the stupendous plan which embraces

* 2 Peter, iii. 34.

braces universal space, and runs through infinite ages, must be in our eyes almost imperceptible. But the longest eras by which men compute are, in the sight of him who conducts the whole system, 'as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night.'—'The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come *.' He who at first brought the light out of darkness, and from the mass of confused elements reared a world in the fairest order and proportion, is surely able to educe from the seeming confusion of present events a full display of that wisdom and goodness on which he now calls on us to rely. 'Rest in the Lord, therefore, and wait patiently for him. He is the rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are judgment: A God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he †.'

* Habbak. ii. 3.

† Psalms, xxxvii. 7. ; Deuteronomy, xxxii. 4.

S E R M O N XVI.

PART SECOND.

ON OUR IMPERFECT CONCEPTIONS OF
THE THOUGHTS AND WAYS OF GOD.

ISAIAH, lv. 8.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, saith the
Lord.*

IT was proposed to illustrate the proposition in the text,

I. By stating a few instances in which we ought chiefly to beware of ascribing the thoughts and ways of men to the Supreme Ruler of the world.

II.

II. By representing some dangerous mistakes which actually prevail in consequence of not attending to this important caution. Having finished what was intended on the former of these heads, I proceed now to observe,

I. That, from the neglect of paying a due attention to the truth contained in the text, comparisons taken from the nature of man, and reasonings founded on them, are frequently received as explanations of the divine counsels and government. It is not sufficient, when we think or speak of God, that we beware of ascribing to him the acknowledged imperfections of our own nature. Many qualities which appear amiable in creatures, are infinitely unworthy of the Supreme Creator, and might even include blasphemy in their application to him. Such are all those mutual concessions, and favourable partialities of judgment, which in us very properly take their rise from the consciousness of our common infirmities and errors. To suppose

pose these, influencing the conduct of the Most High, as the Governour and Judge of men, must evidently give rise to mistakes of the most dangerous kind; and yet how prone we are, when left to the natural bent of our own minds, to mingle mere human qualities with our conceptions of God, the history of Religion, in all ages and countries, affords abundant evidence. Systems of laws, analogous to human plans of government, have been set up as standards, according to which short-sighted mortals have ventured to pronounce sentence on the providence and revealed will of their Maker. In all this process of reasoning, it seems to have been forgotten that the modes of the rulers of this world, in governing their subjects, cannot serve, by the most remote comparison, to illustrate the supreme administration of the universe. God is the absolute proprietor of all beings by the most undeniable of titles. By him they were at first brought from nothing, and by him they are conti-

nually preserved. This consideration ought to correct all our reasonings concerning the thoughts and ways of God. Did we habitually reflect that He is the absolute and uncontrollable Sovereign of all his creatures, it would go far to restrain some of the worst propensities in our nature. It is through inattention to this great truth that we murmur at our own station among his works, that we quarrel with his laws, censure the ways of his Providence, and reject the offers of his grace. All this proceeds from neglecting to fix in our minds the habitual impression that the nature of God is infinitely exalted, and consequently that his thoughts and ways are in the same proportion raised above the sphere of our conceptions.—When we consider ourselves in the relations we bear to our fellow-creatures, we are conscious of possessing many rights, on which none of them have a title to inroach, and which it is not even lawful for ourselves to surrender. The same idea is apt to mingle itself insensibly with
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the view we take of our relation to God. Here, also, we are ready to entertain the idea of some indefinite claims which we may assert, some right to challenge the reasons why he 'has made us thus.' But, surely nothing can be more evident than that no such reciprocal rights can exist in this relation. In conferring being on us, he established his everlasting title to our subjection; and, when he publishes his laws, the sanction of his authority should be of itself sufficient to enforce our unserved obedience. — It is far, however, from being my intention to assert that all religious sentiment and conduct are to be founded solely on the sense of subjection to sovereign and arbitrary will. God himself disclaims this as the foundation of the service which he requires. *“O my people,”* saith he by his Prophet, *“what have I done unto thee? wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.”* In publishing his will

will to us; as the rule of our obedience; he has at the same time shewn us what is truly good and profitable for ourselves; for 'what doth the Lord require of us; but 'to do justly; to love mercy; and to walk humbly with our God?.' My intention has only been to remind you that the infinite Majesty and absolute sovereignty of the Divine Nature ought to restrain all rash speculations with regard to his administration of the world. *His thoughts,* in this respect, we may be assured, *'are not our thoughts; neither are his ways our ways.'*

III. As the neglect of attending to this important caution leads men to challenge the conduct of God as the Supreme Governor of the world; so it also leads them to question the immutability of his laws. We see that human legislators accommodate their statutes, from time to time, to the corruptions and changes of manners among their subjects; and that there is a

ven a necessity, at times, for the rigour of the law being abated, lest inconveniencies should follow which were not foreseen when it was first enacted. This idea has also been transferred to the divine government: And hence has arisen an opinion, very commonly entertained, that the mercy which characterises the gospel dispensation consists in mitigating the demands of law. In other words, it is supposed that God has been induced to alter his original purposes, to compromise the exactions on his subjects, and to accept what they can afford, instead of what they truly owe him.

Had we been left to the unassisted discoveries of our own reason, the idea of some such lenity, on the part of our Maker, might have naturally presented itself to our minds. In that case, conjecture being our only guide, the most obvious conceptions we could have formed of God would have been by extending our ideas of those who are invested with power and authority on earth

earth to a supreme and infinite object. But, in carrying this idea as far as the mind of man can reach, it would have been still difficult, if not impossible, to abstract entirely from those considerations which influence one human being towards another in the forgiveness of mutual injuries. The high rank of the offenders in the scale of being, on the one hand, the prospect of strengthening and recommending his government, by tempering justice with clemency, on the other, must have been supposed his chief motives in dispensing pardon to the guilty. That pardon, moreover, could never have been imagined to have any effect, farther than barely to remit the punishment threatened against transgressors. Such, I say, are the ideas likely to have been entertained on this subject from the suggestions of unenlightened reason. But, how different from these suppositions is the account which Revelation has given us of the plan in which mercy has been extended to the human race? It is not on account
of

of the original dignity of our nature : For angels, who left their first estate, an estate of far higher rank than our's, are ' reserved ' in everlasting chains, under darkness, to ' the judgment of the great day.' And yet the apostate race of Adam not only attracted the compassion of their Maker, but, to make room for the exercise of this mercy towards them, his ' only begotten Son ' was delivered to the death for us all.' This is grace, sovereign and unsearchable ; it is not to be explained by any human motives ; it has no resemblance to the thoughts and ways of men. ' O the ' depth of the riches, both of the wisdom ' and knowledge of God ! How unsearch- ' able are his judgments, and his ways past ' finding out ! For who hath known the ' mind of the Lord, or who hath been his ' counsellor ? or who hath given to him, ' and it shall be recompensed to him again ? ' For of him, and through him, and to ' him, are all things, to whom be glory, ' for ever and ever *.'

Nature,

* Romans, xi. 33.—36.

Nature, in her hopes of mercy, is constrained to avert her eyes from justice, as an unfriendly perfection of Deity. But God displays the united glory of all his attributes, in forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. He hath laid help for us on one mighty to save. Of him he has exacted, with all the rigour of justice, that to us might be dispensed, without any obstacle, all the riches of his grace. 'Him hath he
 'set forth as a propitiation, through faith
 'in his blood, to declare his righteousness
 'for the remission of sins that are past,
 'through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness:
 'That he might be just, and the justifier
 'of them who believe in Jesus *.' Nor is it only to the *remission of sins that are past* that this plan of sovereign grace extends. The pardon which it bestows is only introductory to a greater and nobler blessing to which human thoughts would never have reached,

* Romans, iii. 25. 26.

reached, nor human ambition aspired: For, along with it is imparted a principle of spiritual life, and of new obedience, a participation of the divine nature, a title to, and a growing meetness for, an everlasting inheritance with saints in light. 'For whom God did foreknow,' as the objects of his redeeming love, 'he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren: Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified * :—' So that, receiving abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, they shall reign in life by one Christ Jesus †.

III. The neglect of attending to the important caution in the text often produces sceptical doubts as to the extent of the divine administration in ruling the affairs of the

* Romans, viii. 29. 30.

† Ibid. v. 17.

the world. If we consider the usual objections that have been stated against the doctrine of a PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE ever-ruling and directing every event in the UNIVERSE, we shall find them resting principally on the supposition that the Almighty 'is altogether such an one as ourselves,' unequal to so great a multiplicity of cares, or dishonoured like the great ones of the earth by an attention to every minute object. Hence it has been conjectured that he must certainly make use of the means which appear to us most convenient for accomplishing the great variety of ends in his government. And, as general laws, established at first, but afterwards left solely to their own influence, seem to our apprehension the most compendious scheme that could be adopted; the course of Providence has accordingly been represented as little else than a chain of necessary causes, and the opposite belief condemned as detracting from the beauty and simplicity of the great system.—But who made *us* judges

of

of the preferable plan for conducting the affairs of the UNIVERSE? Who has assured us that *our ideas* of beauty and simplicity of administration are to be a rule to the Supreme Governour of all? Who has suggested that the Infinite Mind is distracted by variety of objects, or that Omnipotence is fatigued with multiplied operations? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding *.

Suffer me now to conclude this discourse with an address to three different classes of persons.

FIRST, To those who indulge a false peace and security, founded on ideas of the divine character for which he has given no authority in his own word. This description, it is to be feared, applies to many even

even of those who enjoy the light of the gospel. But I must warn all such that their hopes are presumptuous and unwarranted. To whom does the passage with which the text is connected afford any comfort?—To those only who lay hold on the ‘*everlasting covenant*,’ even the ‘*sure mercies of David*.’ What *covenant* can you plead? Has the forgiveness of sin been promised upon any grounds separate from the mediation of Jesus Christ? If not, whence, I beseech you, can ye derive any hopes of it? Instead of acceding to the plan which God himself has proposed for the salvation of his guilty creatures, instead of coming to Christ, through whom alone his mercy is offered, you obstinately keep yourselves beyond the reach of his grace, ‘*aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenant of promise, without God, and without hope in the world*.’ Be assured, every declaration of the divine mercy has a reference to that covenant in which alone sinners can have the hope
of

of pardon without impeachment to the justice of God, and without detracting from the honour of his law. Be assured also, that the religion of Christ, while it holds out these merciful proposals to such as are willing to accept them, presents, at the same time, a more awful prospect to the unbelieving and impenitent, than if they had never heard its sound. For, if this grace that is revealed in the gospel be despised and rejected, there 'remain-
'eth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries *.'

SECONDLY, This subject leads me to address those who would willingly lay hold of God's covenant of grace, but who are in bondage through fear, lest the greatness of their guilt should exclude them from the consolations with which it abounds. I do not mean to sooth your anxieties, by saying
that

† Hebrews, i. 27.

that God's thoughts of your unworthiness are lighter than the deepest sense of it which you can entertain. 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.' But this I am warranted to lay before you, as a sure ground of comfort, that the riches of his grace, and the greatness of the salvation which he offers, far exceed all the standards by which you are naturally disposed to estimate them. 'Though, therefore, your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*.' Be not therefore 'faithless, but believing.' Think not that God is straitened in his compassion, as you are straitened in your own bowels, or that, because you find it hard to forgive your brother who offendeth you until seven times, God has, in like manner, become implacable, through the multitude of your transgressions.—
 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the

* Isaiah, i. 18.

‘the unrighteous man his thoughts, and
‘let him return unto the Lord, and he
‘will have mercy on him, and to our
‘God, for he will abundantly pardon.
‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
‘neither are your ways my ways, saith the
‘Lord.’

LASTLY, The subject affords ground to address those who are suffering under the temporary disquietudes incident to religious minds. When the children of God sit in darkness, and have no light, when they complain that he has ‘cast them off forever, that he ‘has forgotten to be gracious, and in anger ‘shut up his tender mercies;’—we are warranted to say that this is their infirmity, and to call on them, for their consolation, to ‘remember the years of the right hand of ‘the Most High.’ His purposes, in thus depriving you for a time of the light of his countenance, are not as your desponding thoughts represent them. Your desires are rash and premature. You would pluck the fruit while it is yet green and hurtful.

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He reserves it for you till it be ripe and mellow. You would have the joys of religion previous to its discipline. Your Heavenly Physician knows your true interest better. Yield yourselves, therefore, unto him without reserve. 'Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain.' And shall not we exercise a similar patience in waiting for the mature glory of the future world, and in submitting, for the present, to those varied means of discipline which are designed by our Heavenly Father to perfect the cure of our diseased nature? In the midst of your perplexing thoughts, let these gracious words revive your minds: 'In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer *.'

* Isaiah, liv. 8.

F I N



